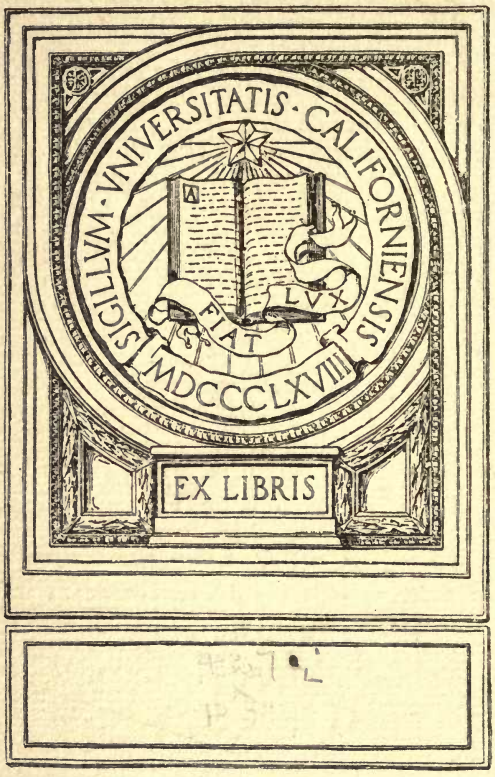
WILD-LIFE-ON A-NORFOLK-ESTUARY

A-H-PATTERSON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WILD LIFE
ON A NORFOLK ESTUARY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOTES OF AN EAST COAST NATURALIST

NATURE IN EASTERN NORFOLK

UNIV. OF
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THE SKIPPER OF THE "MOORHEN"

WILD LIFE
ON A NORFOLK ESTUARY

BY

ARTHUR H. PATTERSON

ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE MARINE BIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

WITH A PREFATORY NOTE
BY HER GRACE THE DUCHESS OF BEDFORD

WITH FORTY ILLUSTRATIONS

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

TO

HER GRACE

MARY, DUCHESS OF BEDFORD

THIS BOOK IS

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

260917

"The man who consecrates his hours
By vig'rous effort and an honest aim,
At once he draws the sting of life and death;
He walks with Nature, and her paths are peace."—YOUNG

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PREFATORY NOTE

LYING as it does right in the track of migration, no county in England has such a large list of birds as Norfolk, or records so many rare visitors.

The seashore, the mudflats of Breydon, the marshlands of the Broads, all teem with bird-life, and still boast themselves the home of many rare breeding species.

In this county Mr. Patterson has spent most of his life, devoting all his spare time to the study of Nature.

His perseverance in the face of early troubles which would have completely disheartened many physically stronger men, his keen powers of observation, accuracy, and love of Nature, make his books a valuable contribution to Natural History as trustworthy records of the habits and traits of the fauna of his county.

As a student, rather than a professed scientist, his books have a special value for other students as giving an insight into his own methods, and the steps by which he became familiar with the wild life round him.

The present volume brings the annals of Breydon up to date, and will be a welcome addition to ornithological literature.

M. BEDFORD,

Woburn

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A SHORT preface seems to me necessary in order to explain my reasons for adding to the list of volumes relating to my beloved county.

From my earliest boyhood Breydon, that most interesting tidal water lying to the west of Great Yarmouth, has had an unspeakable charm for me. My father hired an allotment garden at Runham Vauxhall, now built upon by the council schools. The gardens were separated from Breydon by a reedy ditch (wherein I first studied the habits of sticklebacks and ditch prawns), the New Road, the railway, a wide marsh, and the "walls." When I was sufficiently big to climb the tool shed, I used to do so to catch a glimpse of a silver streak that edged the apex of the walls at high water—*that was Breydon!* The boom of a distant punt-gun and the sharper crack of a fowling-piece conjured up in my mind strange fancies, which were heightened by the scream of the startled wildfowl, and the passing to and fro overhead of great flocks of gulls.

I caught my first real glimpse of Breydon one day when, armed with a fish-head and a length of knotted twine, I slipped down, with other muddy urchins, unknown to my father, to the riverside, in quest of a "sea-sammy" (crab), which I dared not take home.

My father's inveterate abhorrence, not lessened in this his eighty-ninth year, of "the muddy, dangerous place," only served to increase my interest in it, and as I became still keener to explore it, I would skulk at the heels of any tolerant gunner to get on to the "walls," or ramble to its vicinity whenever opportunity offered. I shall never forget

my first sail across Breydon in the punt of a shoemaker friend, whose boat-shed to-day adjoins my own. Since those days of dreaming I have spent many pleasant hours upon and around this favourite haunt, in companionship with the birds that frequent it, and the rugged men who, from hard necessity as well as instinctive liking, have tried to wrest a precarious living out of its oozy depths. My own interest in it has never lessened, and the present volume owes its existence largely to this fascination.

My old houseboat, the *Moorhen*, too leaky now to drift about in the Broadland rivers, lies high and dry on a Breydon "rond," against Banham's marsh farm, and makes a snug observatory, from which the whole of Breydon lies under observation. Under its roof I spend many a summer night, and often a pleasant day, watching or listening to the wild birds that at most seasons haunt the estuary.

I well remember taking Professor Garstang to see Breydon from the railway bridge.

"*What a magnificent fauna should be found here!*" he remarked enthusiastically.

He was not far wrong, for as a bird resort it was once noted and is still eminent, and for the variety of its fishes and other wild life it is unrivalled.

My *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, published in 1905, was intended to be my last book, and it very nearly proved to be so, for on the day that I dispatched the MS. to the publishers I fell seriously ill, and did not recover for some months. I can hardly hope ever to be so venturesome again as I have been, for Breydon is a wild, hard place, trying even to the most robust.

The second part of this work is a continuation of my first book, *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist.* Many of those records were of a controversial character, and my observations not being then complete, are continued in the present book, while other notes have been added since the publication of the first series, for in Nature work there is no finality.

Perhaps I ought to apologise for the rather crude sketches illustrating this volume. I am a self-taught amateur artist; and it was only at the urgent solicitation of two or three of my sincerest friends, and in accordance with the wishes of my publishers, that I consented to "try my hand."

One word more. I should like to say that but for my systematic entering of Nature records and incidents *daily*, or, I should rather say, promptly and regularly, my three East Coast books would never have been written. I began to make "notes" as soon as their value and interest dawned upon me —when I was but a youth, in 1878—a practice I have ever since continued. I have also pasted in my notebooks all correspondence on Natural History subjects as I received it; and the "notes" at the end of this volume will show how useful this habit has been to me; further, these volumes will prove how much there is to be seen and noted even in a very circumscribed area by a man of limited education, means, and leisure. That naturalist is badly situated indeed who cannot accomplish more or at least as much as I have done.

A. H. P.

Ibis House,
Great Yarmouth

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

WILD LIFE ON A NORFOLK ESTUARY

CHAPTER I

BREYDON

THREE not inconsiderable rivers, the Yare, the Waveney, and the Bure, fed by sundry smaller streams, pour their mingled waters through Yarmouth Haven into the sea. In the course of their meanderings through the lowlands, here and there in the deeper depressions of the valleys, they broaden out into shallow lakes known as the famous Broads. At all seasons of the year their waters are fresh, although at long intervals exceedingly high tides carry up the "salts" perilously near to them. The confluent rivers combine to form, on the western side of Yarmouth, a large inland lake some miles in extent, known as Breydon—the *Broad Water* of the Saxons—which acts as a natural backwater to Yarmouth Harbour.

I have often pictured to myself what a magnificent estuary this water-covered plain must have been in the ages long ago, when the Roman galleons sailed up *Garienis Ostium* to their camp at Burgh Castle, signalling "All's well!" to the camp at Caister, as their vessels ploughed the sea that then rolled over the site of Yarmouth, as the North Sea now sweeps over Scroby Sands. From the stern sheets of the old *Moorhen* I can turn my glasses round, sighting clearly the hanger at Caister West End, its sandy cliff-line distinctly showing beyond the level of the Bure marshes, and trending away north-west, forming a background for windmills and the brown-tanned sails of the wherries that follow the course of the winding Bure. To the westward the "heights" that were

lapped by the sea-waves are seen extending beyond Bradwell to Burgh Castle, where we lose their outlines in a leafy screen of trees and herbage.

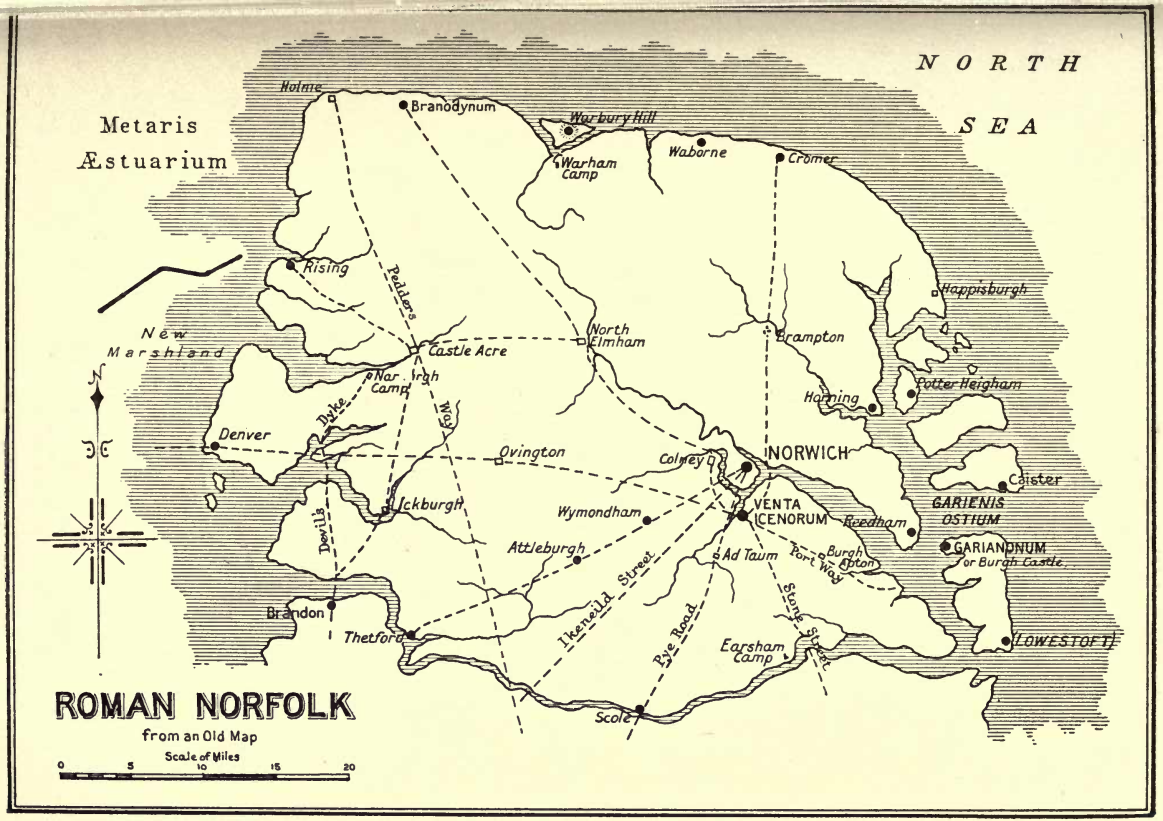
In the course of time an accumulation of alternate layers of moor and silt gradually pushed back the waters from this great alluvial flat, and the drift sand from the eastward helped in this direction. It is said that about the time of Edward the Confessor, the sea retreated from the sand at the mouth of the estuary on which Yarmouth now stands.

"And then there were two channelles for shippes and fishermen to passe and enter into that arme of the sea for utterance of their fishe and marchendizes, which were conveyed to diverse partes and places, as well in the countye of Norfolke as in the countye of Suffolke, by reason that all the wholle levell of the marshes and fennes, which now are betwixte Yermouthe and the citie of Norwiche, were then all an arme of the sea, enteringe within the lande by the mouth of Hierus; and this was about the yere of our Saviour MXL and longe before."[1]

An ancient book, which had made use of this much older quotation, very concisely disposes of any further "processes" by remarking: "When this sand became inhabitable, and a considerable town formed upon its banks, the course of the sea being altered, the rivers and marshes settled in the manner we now find them."

One loves at leisure to linger over the ancient and fascinating records of "Old Yarmouth," and follow its vicissitudes; also to conjure up in the mind pictures of the slow but certain processes of Nature which must have built up its foundations from the sea; and, unfortunately, it is to the latter one must turn in accounting for Breydon in the form we see it to-day, for it seems vain to dig into these old tomes for satisfactory *data*. But one thing is certain, that but for the "walls," or banks, enclosing the rivers and Breydon, a few big tides would very speedily turn the lowlands into another although more restricted *Garienis Ostium;* and great would be the joy of those who delight to wait on wild-fowl, which would, with a return of the ancient conditions, again flock to the watery wastes. But this will not happen, *until the sea*

[1] MS. cui Tit. "*Greate Yarmouth:* a Booke of the foundacion and antiquitye of the sayde Towne," &c., fo. 1560.



NORFOLK WATERWAYS IN ROMAN TIMES

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breaks through at Horsey, or thereabouts, which I feel convinced *must* some day befall.

I am strongly inclined to think that it must have been about the time of the cutting of the first Haven, in the fourteenth century, that the enclosing of these waterways was begun. (The history of the Six Havens, which were afterwards constructed, is one of intense interest, the record of the straits the inhabitants were put to, their great sacrifices, and their indomitable energies, makes most entertaining reading.) Whoever raised these mounds made them well, although breakages and consequent floods have happened from time to time, and even in my own recollection two or three inundations, one of them of a very extensive character, have occurred, through the banks having been broken by stress of heavy tides. Continual vigilance has to be exercised by the marshmen who attend to the drainage mills, and whose place it is to see that weak places are strengthened and the necessary elevation maintained.

The processes of reclamation must have been slow; but they have been exceedingly simple. At one time the low level, now forming the marshes and Breydon, must have been an immense area of "saltings." An extensive series of walls — continuous, zigzagging mounds, following the trend of the tides—were thrown up above the level of high water, the soil that formed them being dug out of what forthwith became deep, parallel ditches. Here two birds were killed with one stone, for the ditches (locally "deeks" or dykes) formed natural drains or channels, into which the surplus water from the newly made marshes naturally drained. In connection with these a great number of smaller drains were cut in various directions, extending for miles. Windmills were erected at intervals near the banks of the rivers and of Breydon, each of which pumped up the water with a huge wheel, that lifted it from the levels to a high-built sluice opening into the waterways. At low tide the sluice gates were opened, and the water escaped. These old mills date back many years; one of them, still in excellent condition, dates, I believe, from 1732.

But many of the tower mills have fallen out of use of late years, and only two or three remain to cast their shadows into Breydon. Dan Banham's mill, standing a mile beyond my

houseboat, and towering up conspicuously from any point of view, is a good type of the old pump-mill; but even this works little when winds are lazy, for there is attached to it an engine that will work more effectually when necessary. Indeed, most of the mills in Broadland give way to steam pumping when an excess of rain has fallen, while many have entirely fallen into disuse; for one good turbine pump will do the work of a dozen windmills.

The marshes have naturally settled through this system of drainage. At one time they were part and parcel of the fast diminishing "ronds" or saltings of Breydon; but now they have become shrunken and solidified to much below their original level. A big tide on Breydon is sometimes some feet above the level of the marshes on the inner side of the wall. The wild birds have not appreciated this alteration, for many of the lower forms of life which allured them have been lost, or have been much reduced in numbers. Many long stretches of the walls have been faced with huge flints to save erosion; a few, where the tides are sluggish, are fronted with salt-loving herbage; but year by year the flints have been added to, and these need replacing at intervals. Even these will all, in time, be faced with concrete, and at recent mending times long stretches have already been stuccoed by rough concrete spread over the jagged flints, filling up interstices, and making an enduring rampart.

The walls are sufficiently wide at the apex to form a tolerable footpath, muddy enough in wintry days, and wearisome in summer and autumn, when the long wiry grasses close over the footway. But a ramble along them is always an interesting experience, except on ordinary November days, or anything like them, for shelter is out of the question. After rain or heavy dews the wet grasses soak the boots of the pedestrian. The Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*) grows in abundance on the inner sides of the walls, and the Sea Aster (*Aster tripolium*) shoots out of the clay that holds the huge rough flints in place. The Sea Southernwood, the Scurvy Grass, and the creeping Chenopodiums variegate the banks; a few stretches of stunted reeds, dwarfed by the salinity of the ditches, struggle for existence, growing larger as one nears the Burgh end, until a little way up the rivers, where fresh water runs longest, they overshadow one's boat by their ten-foot-long stems.

The saltings or "ronds," that at one time fronted long stretches of the walls, have grown less and less as the years and the waves have rolled by; and there remains but one of any extent—Duffell's rond, on the narrowest portion of which my old houseboat *Moorhen* rests. The crumbling away of the saltings, added to the silt from the rivers eddying on to the flats, has made Breydon "grow up" fast and surely; and one or two other causes contributing to this—to the Breydoners—disastrous result will be noted in the later chapters.

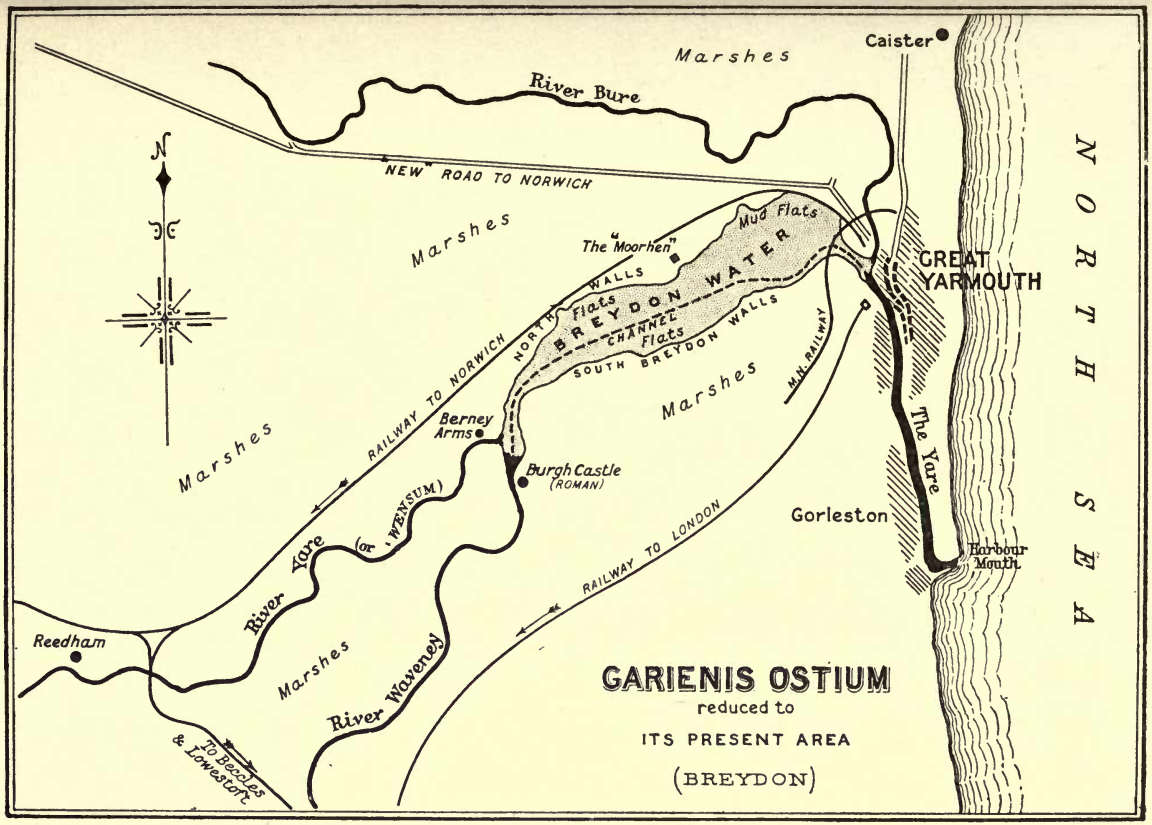
Breydon, to my mind, looks charming from any standpoint. I have viewed it with admiration from the parish church steeple, from which one sees it spread like a lagoon of silver. Looking down Breydon from Berney Arms, when the full tide is flowing, one sees a noble lake divided, not exactly in the middle, by two long rows of "stakes," (the larger division on the left): the water shallows abruptly over the flats, as it does on the right of the red-painted guide-posts. The others are tarred. Along the channel, between stakes, glide white-sailed yachts, and laden wherries, "hulled" on the actual pattern of the ships of the old sea-kings, race merrily along, impelled by their huge, high-peaked sails. If the wind be free they make easy work of it; if not fair, they tack smartly from side to side, gaining on each board, with more picturesque action. And here and there, like tiny torpedo-boats, speed the punts of the eel-babbers and the open boats of the smelters.

The variations in cloud and sky are intensified in the waters of Breydon, and the lover of the beautiful sees here a never-ending, ever-changing panorama with fine "effects." The sunsets, viewed from the townward end, are not surpassed in England. The outlook changes every hour. On fine days, even at low tide, when the flats are bare, amazing colourations—greens, browns, and golden—are seen at dawn and sunset; and at no season are they altogether unlovely. And when the sun has set, and the stars see themselves reflected in the cool depths; when the moon flings her radiance on rippling water and moist ooze; there is yet something to charm and enthral one.

Enough has been said of the charms of Breydon. Those who would view them at their best should choose the sunnier days, and make sure before starting that the flood-tide is "making," for everything seems then full of life and beauty.

A tide-table stands at the foot of the Haven Bridge, on the south side, on whose clock-like faces the times of each high water at the bar for the day are noted. Allow one hour later for Breydon. A walk to Burgh on the five and a half miles zigzag of "walls," on fine days, is interesting; and an examination of the grey ruins of the old Roman walls will repay the journey thither. A good pair of field-glasses will interest the stroller as he journeys. The north side of Breydon affords quite another aspect. One should make for the tollgate near Vauxhall Station, pay a halfpenny, walk along the New Road as far as the second gate beyond the first half a right-angle turn in the road, cross the two gates, the narrow bit of marsh, and the railway, *in spite of the notice board*, and then ramble on in a westerly direction to Berney Arms. A noon train usually starts for Norwich, passing Berney Arms, and setting down passengers *if required*. It is a fourpenny ride to this one-man railway station, which is separated by two marshes and three gates from Berney Arms, a quaint, cheerless alehouse, that draws more than half a barrel per fortnight, and supplies any who ask for them with a jug of coffee and rich, sweet cheese and bread, or allows the visitor to munch his own refreshments. A chat with the natives, and the smelters one sees here, is always a source of interest, and not infrequently of amusement. The walk home is by no means uninteresting or tedious. The huts of the smelters and the wildfowlers dot the monotonous level with bits of colour.

There is one Breydon picture, framed in a circle of verdure, that always bewitches me. To enjoy a view of it I start by tram from Southtown Bridge, getting off at the Boundary Road, a mile journey. From here a three-miles' walk across the bridle paths and through country lanes, from which glimpses of Breydon may be snatched at intervals, finds one on *the edge of the old estuary*. On reaching Burgh church a right-angle turn is made down-hill, and Berney Arms and the confluence of the rivers Yare and Waveney lie before one. If a wherry and a yacht or two are passing at this moment a most beautiful picture is presented. A few yards from Burgh church is the Roman well, where one may refresh himself; and the ruins of the Camp are but a hundred yards farther on. Pursuing the right turn one comes to Breydon walls, along which one may ramble back to Yarmouth.



BREYDON TO-DAY

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Should any ornithologist seek to get afloat on Breydon, there are several punters—Breydoners *au naturel*—who may be found near their shelter on the Suspension Bridge Quay—or the watcher may be arranged with; while a friend of mine, named Halls, who keeps a motor-boat moored at Cobholm, is ever ready to "show" Breydon under pleasant and agreeable conditions.

CHAPTER II

WINTER DAYS ON BREYDON

FICKLE WINTER

WINTER is ushered in on Breydon often long before dreary November has counted up thirty gloomy days. It sometimes steals upon us in the dull, lifeless fog, shortening the already fleeting days, making the damp nights hideous, and the silence oppressive and mournful, as the occasional clangour of the Bell buoy, far out in the roadstead, reverberates across dark dancing wave and maram-clad sand-dune. And the solitary wildfowler, moored in his snug little houseboat in a sheltered creek in the saltings, taking a last look around him, seeing nothing, and hearing only the clamour of a parcel of wigeon busy on the "grass" at supper-time, and the bleat of the lightship fog-horn, slams to his cabin-door, puts a bit more coal on the fire, and thanks his lucky stars that he is not among those away yonder manning the "ships that pass in the night."

Now and again grim winter bursts upon us with gale and flood, churning up the tide as it forces its way up against the wild north-wester, until the muddy waves roll across the flats in dirty, foam-tipped lines, that spend their fury on each other in the channel, or beat up fitfully and broken in a baffled mêlée upon the sturdy flint walls, tossing up with their last futile effort the wreckage of the torn *Zostera*, and the flotsam that quieter tides bore upstream and deposited among it. Sometimes the storm breaks adrift the huge rafts of timber, and flings big balks disdainfully with the lighter flotsam; and the wild sea-bird, ill at ease on land or sea, tosses wildly above head, finding no rest for the sole of her foot on the submerged mudflats, and wearied with her fishing in the hollows of the sea waves.

The moods of winter on this great tidal water are many, and Breydon must be visited day after day to see them all. There is the bright, crisp, frosty morning, when the air is keen, and hoar-frost sparkles on the grass-topped walls, and glitters on the ragged fish-basket left by the tide on the rond below. Then there comes the day of drizzle and rain-storm, with big, cumbrous, leaden clouds, molten and chilling, driving before the west wind like floating continents, dented and broken and rifted sometimes with peaks, and capes, and mountains of snowy white and sickly yellow. On such days the very crows wear a more bedraggled air as they skulk along by the "walls," seeking a dinner of carrion, and the gulls sit hunched up on the flats with a woe-begone air. Then the snow-time comes in a wall of cloud with which the north wind covers up all Nature, as with a pall, and one cannot see beyond the fleecy fringing that surrounds him. Such are the days one experiences on Breydon from the time that winter steals on us till its reluctant departure in boisterous March.

* * * * * *

IN FOGGY WEATHER

On a foggy day we take our first ramble along the southern wall. The slight frost of the morning has been succeeded by a raw and chilling wind that drove in the fog-bank; and the apex of the wall has softened into greasy mud that burdens our feet with layer upon layer of sticky clay, and which, in spite of the moisture on the wall-grasses, refuses to be brushed off. On our right is the channel, whose farthermost side we can but dimly discern: on our left the marshes are soon lost in the grey gloom. A fieldfare or two are disconsolately hopping among the fresh-cast mole-heaps for any stray beetle which may have hastened upwards at the mole's coming; and an occasional meadow-pipit darts from the ditch-side on seeing us, twittering its surprise or displeasure at being disturbed from its quest of the *Sphœromidæ* or *Hydrobia* which are clinging to ditchweeds, or climbing the broken reed-stems in their seemingly purposeless peregrinations.

The wall-rats—the vilest of a vile race, which make their home in the banks of Breydon, and seek their living on the

carrion that floats to them—run their burrows upward for fear of inundation and, for convenience, burrow out on the inner and grassy side, for the sake of the fresher water in the ditches. You will observe their runs, leading from their burrows to the ditch-side, worn into well-defined tracks, so rounded that you might run a cricket ball down as truly as you see the ball gliding in a draper's cash-ladder. Out of one of the burrows is sticking a handful of black feathers—the tail and wing-feathers of a hapless rook. Some "walking" gunner wanted to empty his old muzzle-loader yesterday; he did not wish to return with it loaded, as a damp charge might on the morrow lose him a chance at a wigeon or a plover. The rook, unfortunately, came within range and fell a victim to his aim and heartlessness, tumbling down a bunch of bleeding flesh and broken feathers,—"like a bunch of rags" he described it; and the sportsman (?) left it where it fell, complimenting his fowling-piece, and blessing his deadly aim. A rat in a burrow hard by heard the shot, and knew its purport; he licked his paws, peered out of his hole, and later on mustered up courage and came out. He had before connected these strange noises with good suppers thereafter; and if he knew any local saws one of them must have been "You never know your luck"! He was hunting the walls with the perseverance of a stoat—which now and again hunts rats in turn—when a puff of wind ruffled the wing of the rook, and his keen eye saw it. To run up and seize his prize was the matter of a moment, and a few minutes' labour brought it to his burrow. He could not drag it in, so he bit through the neck, and took the head down; then he came up again and set to work upon the carcase. Why prolong the inferences? We lift up the remains by one wing and find scarcely a particle of muscle left on the breast and leg and wing-bones.

The "rond," or "salting," as they call it elsewhere, is covered with the colourless remnants of the Sea Scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*). It seems strange, but linnets and larks appear to be partial to this semi-marine herbage in the winter, and flocks of them often frequent it. We put up several of either species as we stumble along. From a bunch of woolly-crowned Michaelmas daisies a dozen or more snow-buntings take to wing with soft piping notes of protest, and

settle on the marsh behind us: they will come again to the lettuce-like seeds, as soon as we are deemed far enough off for safety. On the "low" in the rond the downy seed-tufts are wheeling about like tiny ships in a whirlwind. They have not fulfilled their mission, which was to take the seeds with them, and drop them anywhere where the wind might pitch them, or the waves fling them up. In autumn the ronds and walls are gay with the bright purple *Aster*.

We will go as far as "Stone Corner," a projecting point of the walls which marks the end of the tide-worn rond. The fog is becoming denser, and a short stroll must suffice to-day; we do not expect to see many birds, for the flats are hidden, and the few birds that may be haunting them are silent; even the gulls seem as gloomy as the atmosphere. There are some lapwings calling on the marsh, but we do not see them; they are simply piping to keep their fellows in touch with them, and comparing notes.

A patch of white on the bit of water-worn rond attracts attention, and our binoculars are at once levelled at it. It is unmistakably a gull, to all appearances a large "grey," the immature of the saddle-backed gull. On closer inspection we can detect a rat at work upon it, and—indeed a second one, for they fall to sparring—a pair of ghouls quarrelling over the dead! The death of that bird we may safely place to some sportsman's (?) credit: it was not killed outright, but "fell away" badly wounded, and dropped in the channel, to die miserably, and be cast up by the tide and wind. On jumping a narrow drain, we land on the rond and come up to the carcase; the rats, watching our movements, have bolted to their burrows in the walls. The gull lies on its back, a bunch of bones, with scattered feathers lying around it. More than the two rats have been busy upon it, for it is quite fresh—the bones, picked bare, are still red. The *sternum* is enough clean-picked for a specimen, while the vertebræ of the neck, and the skull, are entirely divested of flesh, even the eye-sockets being emptied. So well do the brutes clean up their dishes.

The afternoon is waning, and the fog gives place to a nasty drizzle: on our way back we are enabled to see across the flats. And what a concourse of gulls do we discover: notwithstanding the unpleasant atmosphere, we are tempted to sit down on the stone wall—having first spread an india-

rubber apron on the edge of it—and watch for a little while their doings. Some of the ancient flints are gay with lichens, many of them creeping into the chinks and crannies of the concrete. Here is the beautiful orange-coloured *Placodium muvorum*, and the grey *Lecanora galactina*, or something closely allied to it. These thrive well on this exposed "mile point," notwithstanding their frequent deluging by the salt scud from the waves flung by the strong nor'-wester. Let me refer to my entry respecting the manœuvring of the gulls in front of us:—

"*Nov.* 10*th*, 1906.—An immense concourse of gulls, in three detachments, covering a large area of the flats. One lot, which consisted mainly of greater black-backs, nearly all adult, spread over at least half an acre—there were probably 1500 individuals gathered there. There was an easterly breeze blowing, and all three squadrons sat, or rather stood, facing the wind. At four o'clock (their usual time), after some amount of chatter, a bunch of a hundred flew up, making still more noise, and then mounted in the air, and sped seawards, forming a perfect V as they fell into line. Scattered birds kept drawing up to the main flocks, some from the far end of Breydon. How conspicuously they 'loomed up' against the sombre background of drab flats and grey, lowering sky! Presently, before the first lot had entirely disappeared in the distance, another contingent, in like manner, rose as at some well-understood signal, and followed the others in V-shaped flight. Thus went flock after flock to their night's repose on the sea, and to their early morning's attendance on the herring-nets, until by dusk they had all disappeared, to return to-morrow to the flats to sleep off their surfeit of herrings, when hunger would again set them prowling on the mudflats, or on the marshlands, to repeat at eventide the same evolutions. There were at least 6000 gulls of various ages and species — probably 7000. It is a matter of general observation that the recent years of protection have tended greatly to the increase of the larger gulls."[1]

The lights of the town twinkle hazily in the downpour as we reach home.

* * * * * *

[1] Extract from my notebook.

IN TIME OF STORM

Years of constant observation help the field naturalist to make, at times, very satisfactory forecasts. The colour of the water passing up-river, the force of the current, the altered rumble of the surf on the seashore, and the movements of birds are all an index, plainly printed, to him who cares to read it. The month of November, 1897, was a remarkably foggy one and, until the end of it, a placid one. On the night of the 24th I observed a movement among wading birds, and heard the golden plover plaintively crying overhead in the darkness. I noted in my log this fact, with that of the flocking, next day, of the smaller gulls to the river to feed, both denoting, as I remarked, "rain—and bad weather close at hand." On the 28th, a most disastrous gale and flood followed: it blew for four and twenty hours, the sea breaking through the sandhills at Horsey,[1] and licking away enormous masses of the cliffs, while tide *upon* tide, without an ebb between, rushed furiously up Breydon, twirling huge timbers as if they had been straws, and flooding houses (among them my own), warehouses, and wharves. I did my best damming and banking doorways and drains, but to no purpose, for the sea-water percolated and oozed through soil and crevice.

Disgusted, I went up Breydon walls to my houseboat; it was a fine but wild scene as the waters raced, frothing, seething, and tumbling, up the estuary. They beat in fantastic waves on the walls, whose apex they all but reached, flinging the spray in a feathery shower over on to the marshes, while through rat burrows and cracks in the dyke trickled miniature tinkling streams. Small flocks of belated knots and dunlins flew wildly round, seeking in vain for a flat on which to rest and feed; the seagulls had given up the search and gone inland. I had to walk bent almost double. I saw a female eider duck, driven from its northern home, seeking shelter under the lee of the wall near my houseboat; I could have reached it with a fishing-rod. A marshman also saw it, ran for his gun, and promptly killed it. Some snow-buntings and larks fitfully sneaked about at marsh corners, as unhappy

[1] The breach has been patched up—*but for how long?*

as the knots. A poor little guillemot, blown to the marshes, had been discovered and mutilated by a rat.

On the further side of Breydon I could see the waves breaking furiously on the walls where they ran broadside to the wind, and great sheets of water, with frothy borders, were flung over on to the grassy levels behind. Houseboats, floating high above the level of their protecting saltings, tossed like ships at anchor; the eel-fishers and smelters were safe in port at the quayside taverns, or in sheltered corners near their beloved Breydon, discussing bygone gales and floods, comparing notes and figures of past hauls, "cursing their luck" at being kept ashore, whilst they "blessed their lucky stars" that they were not afloat in cockleshell punt and smelt-boat. Were they given to reading Dickens, these men would canonise Mark Tapley.

The wind howled when it rushed among the telegraph wires on the railway, flinging here and there a pole and a signal post across the metals. One post went down as a train came along and the engine cut clean through it. The houses of the marsh farmers lost many a tile, and tops of many haystacks were roughly shorn off, and the hay scattered like feathers. It took me an hour to plough through the blast to the *Moorhen.*

We oftener get high tides and floods up-river now, for the wasting of the cliffs lying north of Yarmouth allows a sharper set-in of the North Sea currents, and, as I pointed out in a local paper, "Our Commissioners are playing a dangerous game in so eagerly (and constantly) deepening the Harbour mouth." To this lament and others of mine, a well-known county man and an ardent angler replied:—

"On the gale and high tide I beg to say I am entirely of your opinion. The cupidity of your townsmen will in time swamp your now flourishing watering-place. The continual deepening of Yarmouth Bar lets the tide run up with such a force that any gale from the N.W., with the water low in the river, is bound to swamp everything. For the sake of increased harbour dues the place will in time be wiped out. The salt water comes up the river now so far with every N.W. wind that fishing (angling) in the lower reaches, as at Cantley and at Reedham, is now quite a failure. . . ."

The pressure of a huge influx of water found out a weak place in the walls at the Berney Arms end of Breydon, on

December 23rd, 1894. A heavy north-west gale had been blowing all the previous day, and two flood tides, without an ebb between them—i.e. one tide following in the wake of the other, there having been no intermediate fall—piled up Breydon four or five feet above the level of the marshes behind. The water filtered through a weak spot that had been overlooked by the tenant of the marshes, whose business it was to watch eventualities, and be prepared against them; an ever-increasing volume of water poured in, until a huge gap was torn, and hundreds of thousands of tons of salt water swept into the marshes, first filling the ditches, and then flooding many acres before the tide began to fall again. But before another tide could add to the inundation, steps had been made to remedy the breach, and the pump-mills were set going night and day, flinging the water back again. Curiously enough, while the gale was at its height, great flocks of lapwings were seen coming in from over the North Sea—dead beat (as they always arrive) by flying at more than right-angles to the wind, as is their wont on migration. These settled in the lowlands, being attracted by the pervading moisture, and the millions of worms that came to the surface to die of the salts. To their hosts were added huge flocks of various gulls that made the marshlands white with seafowl, and that reminded ancient marsh-dwellers of the days of their youth, when similar sights were far less infrequent. The usual onslaughts were made by the gunning fraternity, and many a wretched lapwing never saw the new year.

It snowed four hours without ceasing on December 30th, and Breydon and the surrounding marshes were seen under quite another aspect, to the delight of those devoted to gunning pursuits. My notebook at this time refers to numbers of little auks[1] coming to grief, flocks of sheld-ducks, scaups, scoters, wigeon, pochards, golden eyes and others being driven into the neighbourhood. I went to Burgh Castle on January 7th (1895), and saw astonishing numbers of gulls and lapwings still congregated on the opposite marshes, not yet tired of their diet of earthworms. As for ducks—"the oldest inhabitant" in Belton whom I interviewed, notwithstanding his many winters' experiences, said "he'd never known so many knockin' about in that neighbourhood afore."

[1] *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, p. 11.

A RIME FROST

A spell of sharp frost, with slight snowfalls and a smart wind from the north-east, ushered in the year 1894, and for some days the neighbourhood put on one of its old-time aspects, wild birds of various species thronging the coast,[1] inducing many an old sportsman who had not smelt powder for years to indulge once more in the pastime of shooting. The Broads were frozen over, and Breydon assumed an arctic appearance.

On January 7th, a dense rime frost had scattered the "hoar-frost like ashes" over the face of Nature. Few persons went to church that day, and fewer still went to look upon Breydon; for except near the "Lower Run," and in the channel nearer home, it was a vast field of ice.

The outlook on the marshes, as I strode briskly up the New Road, was wintry enough to suit the most exacting. There was a strange stillness everywhere, broken only by the merry laughter of some clumsy skaters on the distant ditches. Not a breath of wind rustled among the remnants of last year's reeds, which lined the wide ditch on our right, and their few tufted heads hung heavily with the weight of hoar-frost upon them. The ragged willows that then still held up their branches were beautiful now in their garments of white, and the lichens on their gnarled trunks had been touched as if by fairy fingers. A meadow-pipit, with melancholy *cheep*, fluttered from under the stubbly banks, *cheep*ing again to one of his fellows when he overtook him, as if deploring his want of luck, and asking him how many hidden insects he had fallen in with.

I cautiously crossed one of the brackish ditches, and the ice, pierced here and there by reed-stubble, bore me safely; then clambering over a marsh gate and the railway metals, I found myself on Breydon walls. A couple of skylarks were snapping off the brittle grass-bents beside a frozen marsh puddle, their feathers puffed out for extra warmth; they were certainly happier than a snail-loving thrush that hopped inquisitively up to them, as if to compare notes and ask a favour of them. Larks seldom find themselves dinnerless in

[1] Vide *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, p. 60.

the fiercest winter,—there are cabbages, anyway, that can always be had for the looking for, and which, besides, provide famous shelter. My boots crisply brushed off the frost dust from the thistle-stems, the remnants of the goosefoot, and the clinging wall-grasses as I strode along.

The tide was near the full and heaved, as if sighing, under the rough mantle of ice upon the bosom of Breydon, while the creases in her vesture were marked here and there by the swollen "drains," over which the ice lay thinner and weaker, and crackling. Their sinuous windings were lost in the rimy atmosphere which joined, as it were, with the grey ice in a close and indistinct horizon; range of vision was limited at most to a hundred paces. The sun, like a disc of Naples yellow, seemed to be trying to pierce the chilly curtain; it looked dully bright, as one sees it through smoked glass. Scarcely a sound broke on the still air, save an occasional sharp crackling of ice, the weird cry of some bewildered bird, and the yet rarer boom of a fowling-piece, which left one surmising whether a coot, or a wigeon, or a tufted duck had fallen to, or had escaped the shooter. A large gull loomed up indistinctly, as one sees a noctule bat at eventide; it vanished as imperceptibly. A chaffinch, bright and saucy, settled for a moment upon a straggling willow stick thrust out from a broken fish-swill, adding by his presence the finishing touch to an artistic tit-bit I could not help admiring—the dilapidated basket, with its ragged fringe of weed, thrown by the tide against a gnarled stake upon which the frost had drawn leaves and foliage of white, together with some loose flint-stones from the wall, in the hollows of which bright orange and yellow lichens were growing, formed a background to the picture. A fitting tail-piece, I thought, for any sketch of a frost-bound estuary.

Some footprints upon the whitened surface of the ditch, below the walls, described to me how that morning some roving spaniel had been out sporting with his master. Looking more closely at them I observed that they zigzagged in conformity with some tinier "spoor"; these dotted imprints, and a fine-drawn line between them, told how the dog had followed the perambulations of a rat. The footprints of the rat suddenly turned at a right angle and ended in the wall, the dog's continuing alone. A hooded crow had left his

broad-arrowed claw-marks part of the way—he too had been searching for a rat, but as vainly. The thinner trail of a lark, and the still finer one of a pipit, were also visible.

On the ice, a little way from the walls, some crow-marks interested me much more greatly. One spot was dotted with tiny grey feathers, and leading up to them were the imprints of a "hoodie's" feet. A poor little dunlin, "wounded unto death," had flown hither in its death-agony from among a host of its companions, slain by a merciless gunshot. Its life's blood ebbed out, staining the snowy patch with bright crimson; it had died alone on the icy carpet, and the little form had stretched wings and legs, and stiffened directly. Not long did it lie there, for a scouting Kentish crow, prowling around for a breakfast, espied the dead bird; those claw-prints to the right show the spot where he alighted. He walked half a dozen paces, then a confused trampling tells us how he set to work with claws and mandibles, and tore to pieces the poor little sandpiper. Bill and foot and wing are all devoured, save the long flight feathers which he hurriedly pulled out, and a few smaller ones, dropped in his eager haste, for a brother crow may have been ready to rob him; these are all the evidences left of an avine tragedy. Trending a little way from the spot are other footmarks of the crow, leading to where the foul bird took to wing again.

A little further on I noticed more bloodstains, and a number of other footprints; but, in this instance, not a feather remained. How was this? Closer attention convinced me that more than one "hoodie" came to claim the victim. There were ample proofs that there were three. It was very evident too, that, disturbed at his meal almost as soon as he had discovered it, crow number one had snatched up his prize and hurried away with it, hoping to devour it alone. Among the wall-flints I found a fowl; its bones had been picked clean, and feathers lay scattered about on the stones among which stricken pochard and wigeon like to hide when fatally wounded. It had evidently been dragged out, and the wingbones alone remained feathered; even the muscular portions of the wings had been dragged off and swallowed, and by some well-defined teeth-marks it was easy to see that the rats had gnawed off what little the careful crows had overlooked.

The rime frost still hung about thickly when I set off homewards, and the tide was falling. Already some of the flats had drained dry, and the ice had settled on them in broken hummocks, whose edges pointed at various angles. On approaching the North Wall drain I found open water, and the ebb was drawing downstream floe after floe of broken ice. Now one floe would catch in the mud, stop a moment, and then turning, swing again into the tide-way, dashing into another stranded floe with a loud, crackling crash; then the two floes would go on together, splintering, crackling, and sweeping down towards the channel, to continue grating against others coming down with the tide. Now one would catch its edge over another and slide well on to it with a roar, as if at some rough play; then endways up it would go and bury itself in the dark waters, coming up under another as if possessed with the spirit of mischief. One huge floe would crash against one of the stakes, shaking it to its foundations in the ooze below, breaking itself in halves, the severed portions joining forces again directly in the eddy. And so downward to the sea sped acres of broken ice-slabs. In a wake, among the floating ice, swam and dived a poor little dabchick, struggling now for its life, and forgetting its struggle for a dinner; wishing summer days back again, no doubt, and hours of peace and plenty in the Broadland reed-clumps.

A few dunlins were running wonderingly along on the denuded edge of a mudflat. They were hard pressed for food, for the mudworms had sunk lower into the ooze; it may be there were some to be found that the moving ice had scooped out, and left to freeze in their nakedness. One wretched bird whose right leg had been shot away hopped about pitifully, probing here and there for a morsel. A few black-headed gulls were hanging round the mouth of the Bure, snatching up fragments floating upon the surface of the sewage-polluted water.

It is about our own noontide; and our interesting excursion has ended.

* * * * * *

IN DAYS OF YORE

Snow was falling one evening in winter when a worn-out old punt-gunner, at one time one of the most ardent sportsmen on Breydon, sat by my own bright fireside. "Breydon is done for!" said he; and nothing is truer from an old punt-gunner's point of view, for the best season in their day was our present Close Season, when a few birds, good and rare, still drop in among the mudflats; and the days of big shots in the winter-time are probably for ever gone, for Breydon under its altered conditions does not "harbour them" as it did fifty and sixty years ago.

"The winters are different," remarked the old man. His opinion is shared by many men who in their younger days "followed" Breydon; and they will describe in vivid language "those days of ice and snow." On further inquiry, and reference also to past records, I am led to believe that extremely severe winters only obtained at intervals, usually of several years, as they have done since I myself have chronicled events; and on consideration, when certain winters, e.g. 1854–5, 1870–1, etc., have been brought to the old gunners' recollection, they have admitted "it may have been so."

"Be that as it may," said Pestell, "you may get a hard winter, and you 'on't get the birds like you useter; theer ain't the feed, and the water is no suner on the flats than 'tis off again; and if any of 'em do stop there there ain't enough water for you to get your punt to 'em. They sit and laugh at you. Fifty year ago I'm speakin' of—sixty year—why a wherry could sail over the flats at high water from wall to wall, and some parts, what are now dry at less 'an half ebb, were then never free of water. Even in the sixties old brents (geese) used to come fifty and sixty in a bunch to Breydon in hard weather.

"We used to get a tremenjuss lot of pokers (pochards); they used to come in and feed by scores on the poker-grass what used to grow against the north side, right away from the 'Fleet' to 'Rotten Eye'; you could see 'em pullin' and tuggin' at it, eatin' the little white peas on it.[1] Pokers are the

[1] "Poker-grass" was described by Pestell and two or three other old gunners as a kind of "tangle-grass"; it bore white flowers, which "turned to peas"; and all admitted that "pokers gobbled 'em up." Eels used to lie in its labyrinths. It was probably a species of Potamogeton, but is now quite extinct here.

sharpest fowl you ever see; they 'dove' the moment they saw the flash of your powder, and as for gettin' a wounded one, well, it gave you a sweatin'—they used wings and feet, and would sooner drown'd than let you get 'em.

"I once," said Pestell, "got a shot at some pokers after a hard row through 'slub' (half-frozen) ice, and havin' collected 'em, I found it had got so hard I couldn't get back to the channel again.

"The ice formed on the oars as I paddled. My ice-pick was too short to be any use, but I had my eel-pick on a long shaft in the boat; this I laid hold of, and chopped and pushed my way out of it. The ice had so gathered on the boat, and what with that and 'stock ice' risin' from below with the weeds and stuff on it, gave me a pretty good doing to gettin' home!

"I once see the most beautiful white nun—smew, you know—secured in the harbour on a piece of floatin' ice; it couldn't fly, for its feet had got frozen in!

"Did I often see birds fast like that? Well, no; but it was nothin' uncommon to see wounded stints and sich-like small birds what had had legs broken by shot, with one of their feet in a reg'lar ball of ice—from dip, dip, dippin' them in the water, and the water freezin' on 'em."

He had often had ice get to le'ward of him on the ebb, and, being caught and pushed back by the early flood, it had surrounded him, and escape had been impossible but for using his ice-hook—a rather heavier weapon than a boat-hook. He had seen too, as I have, the huge guiding stakes in the channel lifted bodily by the ice clinging around them, drawn as the tide lifted, and carried away. Five shillings was the reward given by the River Commissioners, who claimed them.

Sport had been slack for some days on Breydon (this was in the 70's)——

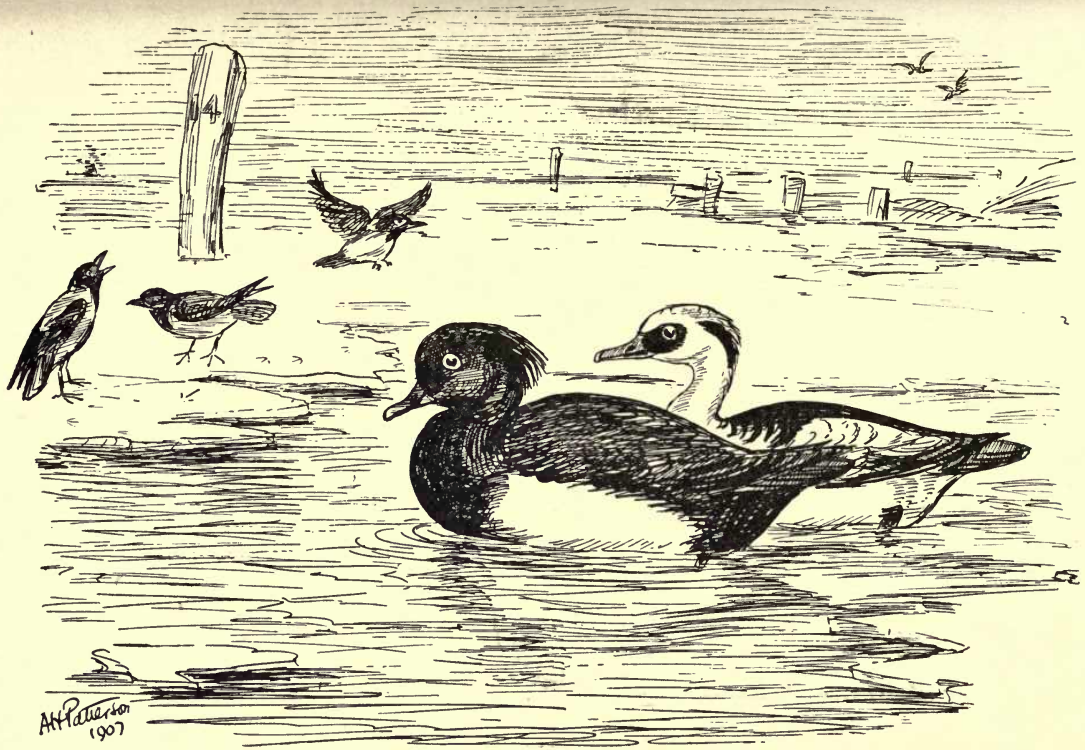
"It blowed terrific one day, and well into the night," said Pestell. "I dropt into the Pleasure Boat tavern for a game of 'crib.' Comin' home late, I noticed the wind had suddenly dropt. I'd got to hear that a tremenjuss lot of fowl had gone to Breydon, so, to my missus's surprise, I put on my things, and told her I was goin' up. I shoved off and pulled against a ragin' ebb, makin' for the houseboat then lying near the Stone Corner. Half-way up Duffell's drain, I stuck in an oar,

thinkin' to have a rest, and, of course, a smoke; and what d'yer think?—to my surprise, on strikin' a fusee on the breech of the gun, with a terrific whir and whiz, hundreds of fowl took to wing all around me. They'd been quietly feedin'. I went to the houseboat and waited till the tide began to lift, and then pushed off to see if they'd kinder settled again. By the aid of my glasses I could see two or three 'ridges' loomin' up black against the light of the town, and made towards these, puttin' up several single fowl within almost oar's length as I went along, frightenin' them, of course, by the hissin' noise on the sides and bottom of the boat rubbin' against the shells (*Hydrobiadæ*) on the grass (*Zostera*). I ventured a shot at one of the thick black ridges, and guessin' my aim by the elevation of the gun, pulled the trigger.

"Well, 'bor, what with the roar of the gun, and the rattle and clamour of their wings and throats, I thought for a minute the world had come to an end! I stuck an oar into the mud, and hung my oily frock on to it to mark the position, and tried to find the fowl, but was baffled by the darkness and tide. Early in the morning, though, I fell in with the fowl I'd shot, which amounted to a score wigeon and mallard!

"Ah! we useter get big shots sometimes; you see, the birds useter come in such flocks that you couldn't help hitting 'em. I once saw a tremenjuss lot of stints (dunlins) sittin' huddled up on a huge floatin' piece of ice; I had some difficulty in gettin' to it through the pack as was floating all round, but I did, somehow, and pulled trigger. I managed to recover two hundred and eighty-five of them, and what is more, I got five wigeon at the same shot, as was sittin' on a hummock a little way behind 'em. Of course, it wasn't easy to get all the cripples, and I didn't. I remember how the Kentish crows chased 'em as they hopped and fluttered about —them wounded ones. Brutal, you say? Well, them sort of thoughts never useter trouble *me*. What's the differs between that and calf-stickin'? Don't both butchers do it for what they can make of their slaughter?"

I can well remember, as a lad let loose from school, how I used to haunt the quayside approaches to Breydon, looking curiously into the snow-sprinkled punts, and viewing with wonder the dead fowl lying on the bottom-boards, or spread on the foredeck.



COMPANIONS IN ADVERSITY. TUFTED DUCK AND SMEW

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"Ah, 'bor," said he, "I remember gettin' a shot at a parcel of wigeon, baggin' sixteen of 'em. I laid 'em on the fore-peak (covered deck), thinkin' 'em all dead. I went ashore to reload my gun, and stood potterin' about waitin' for another shot. One of the ducks that had laid beneath the heap of others came to, fully an hour after I shot 'em, and up on the wing she went. I happened to have my 'hand-gun' under my arm, and up with it, catchin' a glimpse of the fowl as it got between me and the moon, I fired and killed it dead!

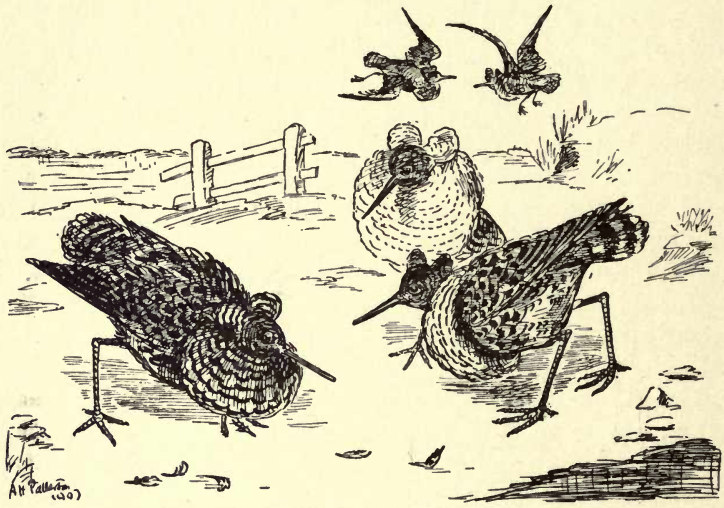
"It wasn't nothin' new to lose birds after you'd shot 'em; the cripples fluttered away even in broad daylight, and you couldn't get over the ice after them, and as for shootin' at night, why, we old gunners often used to shoot *at the sound* of birds we couldn't see, and trusted to luck to hit 'em and retrieve 'em. You remember me tellin' you about how them wigeon hid in the flint wall?[1] But them old crows (hooded) used to annoy me. I once shot a mallard that fluttered ashore on the flat with a broken wing, and before I could break through the ice at the edge of it to get the bird, a parcel of hoodies seized it, tore out its eyes, and had its innerds out while still alive. I got it, however, but it wasn't saleable."

The old man chatted on, sometimes going over his ground again, but to me his yarn was never tiresome, and to my mind it was altogether reliable; for he and others whom I have interviewed, and helped in times of stress, have never tried the long bow on me. A pipe of tobacco makes them reminiscent, and they are tempted to lie only—if they do at all—when they scent drink. Pestell was much interested in pochards, and he added scaups—"hard fowl," he designated them—for, as hard as nails himself (he had served his time as an artilleryman and as a boatbuilder), he delighted in the snow and frost that brought them south. He was emphatic in assuring me "pokers" and scaups, when wounded or hard pressed, would dive and hang by their feet to the "grass," preferring to drown rather than be captured, although the probability is that they sometimes got fast unwittingly in the "tangle," or as likely, when in the thick of it, submerged themselves, having only their bills out of the water for the purpose of breathing.

[1] *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, p. 43.

He knew the ruffs in his younger days. "Them with the frills on?" said he. "Oh, yes! I've seen 'em dancin' and caperin' about on the flats afore now; but that was yeers ago. I've shot into bunches of reeves in September [probably birds of mixed sexes and ages], once at a lot of at least sixty: they must have been bred in the Eastern Counties. Anyway, you never see two old birds coloured alike!"

He once saw a small hawk hanging around Breydon "chivying starlin's." He paid no particular attention to it,



"TIME! GENTLEMEN!" RUFFS FIGHTING

but describing its appearance and colours to one of the Upchers, was told to try to secure it.

"Why didn't you get it?" said Upcher. "I'd have given you a tidy bit for it!"

This put P—— on the alert, and he observed it next morning just over the walls on the marshes, near "George's Deek." He hid himself in the grass, and watched the hobby doing its hardest to bag a starling. The starlings would open out as it made a swoop at them, continually baffling it. After a fruitless trial or two some crows dashed in [presumably] to the help of the starlings, to the great discomfiture of the hawk, who beat a retreat, and was not seen again.

Then the old chap, reloading his pipe, chuckled. Another reminiscence had come back to him.

"I must be a-goin'," said he, "but I'll just tell you about old Steven Bowles," and he laid down his pipe without lighting it.

"One bitter January mornin'—just such weather as this—I went up to the houseboat. I had a shot at a mallard as I went, but found on pickin' it up the shot had ploughed a wide strip clean, as if plucked, out of the breast feathers; of course it wasn't saleable. So I thought I'd have it for dinner. I plucked it and cut it up, shovin' it in the saucepan for a stew. I shoved in an onion, and started to pepper it, when the lid dropped off the box—it was a smacksman's tin one, what held two or three ounces of pepper—and in it went! I felt inclined to chuck the lot overboard, but a thought came into my head to have a bit of fun out of it. I know'd old Steven Bowles was likely to come up, so I let it bile. And presently through the snow loomed up old Stevey, cold as he could well be, and grumblin' about 'bein' frozen to the marrow.'

"'Anything warm aboard?' axed Steve.

"'Stewed duck,' says I, balin' out into a big basin a dollop of duck and gravy, what looked almost like duck biled in ink!

"Bein' persuaded it was all right, although of a rum colour, Steve proceeded to empty the soup down of his neck, amid much puffin' and blowin', and remarkin' on the heat of it. He only finished half the basin, and I couldn't persuade him to have more. He'd have hung his tongue out like a dog, but for fear of bein' frost-bitten. He bade me good mornin', and went on uppards.

"I'll vow," said P——, "he didn't feel the cold much more that day—and it was a raw 'un too." And P—— laughed again!

The joke was rough and ready, but quite in keeping with the rough manners and hard life of the men and of Breydon.

* * * * * *

SOME WINTER NOTES

I have already suggested that hard winters were and are exceptional; and my observations have led me to believe that, notwithstanding that the drainage of the marshes and other altered conditions have affected detrimentally many species, a set-in of sharp wintry weather, especially if it occurs in December, drives many common species hither in unusual abundance, and some usually rare ones in unexpected numbers; among these may be cited mergansers, goosanders, smews, and various geese and swans, besides "hard fowl," e.g. tufted ducks, pochards, golden eyes, scaups, and occasionally long-tailed ducks. Many of these would remain in the lochs and firths of Northern Britain in milder seasons, and even farther north; but driven out by sharp and protracted frosts and snowstorms, they are compelled to venture south.

In visiting Breydon at any season of the year, one must always be prepared for surprises and disappointments. Storms and other climatic influences regulate greatly the movements of many species: one day Breydon may present a miserably bare outlook, without a dunlin or a gull on its surface, and the next, when the visitor refrains from going because of expecting but a barren field, the flats may be alive with migrant waders, or some flock of strange fowl may have dropped in, and are feeding and resting there. The great snowstorm which occurred at the close of 1906 and the early days of 1907, and its effect on bird-life, will long remain fresh in my memory.

I am amused sometimes by the prognostications of those who prophesy hard winters because of an abundance of hawthorn berries, or of gulls flying inland, and the like. It seems to me but natural that hawthorns, like apple trees, should, after a year's rest and unfruitfulness, bear well the following season, and that the birds should make short journeys for a change of food, or to avoid a breeze that might prove inconvenient to them. At the best, I can foresee but a few days' *probabilities* ahead: one gets to a certain extent weatherwise, like the old Breydoners, who spend much of their lives in the open, and are led by experience to prepare for eventualities. We may even suggest an intuitive

instinct in some minds, which cannot be explained. By reference to my notebooks, I find that hard winters, usually, only come at long intervals; and I have many times observed that, unless we get heavy snows before the second or third week in December, we do not often get much after Christmas to worry over, and wildfowlers may expect a poor shooting season here for the remainder of the time.

I made a few observations during the stress of the severe weather, and will give them as I have dated them:—

"*December* 31*st*, 1906.—After a long spell of 'open' winters, something akin to 'the old-fashioned 'uns' obtained during the last week of the year. On the 22nd it rained heavily, well into the night, and next day snow began to fall; birds began to show signs of restlessness, and the black-headed gulls had been for two or three days feeding in the river, flying around the bridge in the heart of the town, a fairly good sign of a change 'of some sort' coming. As an extraordinary tide will often come six hours ahead of a storm, it may be these birds instinctively judge by the temperature of the water, or by some faculty unknown to us. The morning of the 23rd dawned with a fiery glow in the west, which flooded the room as my wife opened the blinds.

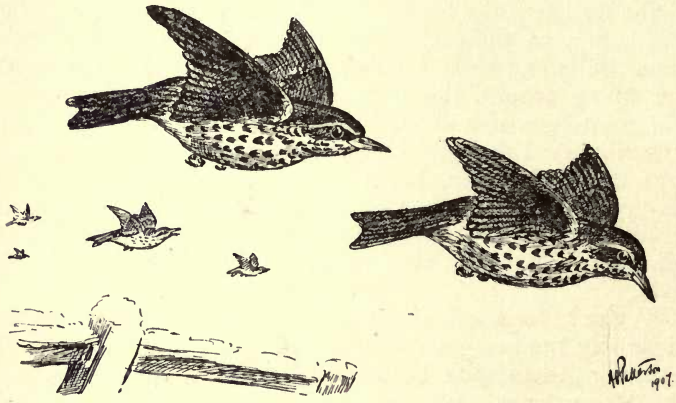
"'We're in for something out of the common!' I remarked, and shortly the red glow cooled into grey, and from out the deepening gloom snow began to fall fast and furiously, and in right dead earnest. My first thoughts went out towards 'the poor birds!'—the birds that would die for want of food and by the hail of shot.

"On the 22nd and 23rd flocks of various wildfowl were observed trooping along the foreshore southwards; one bunch, presumably of duck and mallard, numbering quite 500; and a newspaper 'par' (those mischievous little bulletins!) from Aldeburgh reported that 'huge flocks of ducks, wild geese, wigeon and other fowl are continually passing south to seaboard, indicating a continuance of the present severe weather.'"

Such sights and reports naturally set every owner, or friend's owner of a shoulder or punt-gun to work furbishing up his weapon, and laying in stores of ammunition; local ironmongers were loading cartridges by day and by night; and wild ducks began to fall to the guns of several frequenters of Breydon. Every amateur puntsman got afloat, and had I

been an excise officer I could have made a name by sorting over the regiment of those who, with every kind of gun imaginable, but mostly without gun licences, skulked around Breydon walls and marshes.

On the 27th I went for a stroll to Gorleston Pier Head, having heard a report that some wild ducks "of a sort unknown" were to be seen inside the harbour; but I saw none. A few score small gulls were to be seen floating on the ebb tide near the North Sand just off the pier, all the larger gulls having gone — somewhere, and few indeed were seen here while the severity of the weather lasted. But I noticed a few thrushes (stray redwings and



DRIVEN SOUTH. REDWINGS MIGRATING

their kindred), finches, and a pipit or two cross over the pier, almost within arm's length, in that steady purposeful manner peculiar to them during the normal period of immigration. On the 28th I went for a walk round, crossing the North Denes, sometimes wading through deep snowdrifts, now tumbling into them, and again progressing much after the fashion of a short-legged spaniel getting through deep grass, for the undulations and sudden breaks of the sand-dunes were hardly traceable; and I finally reached the shore. Fortunately I felt in fairly good form. A few out-flying *Turdidæ* and finches passed over me as I floundered through the snow; but when I reached the beach, I found thrushes, fieldfares, redwings (in particular), larks, linnets, pipits, twites, and, indeed, *incessores* of all kinds, even including

goldfinches, flying due south, following the coast-line: silently, like the brown ghosts of birds, they flew—hour after hour—thousands upon thousands! I wondered whence they were trooping and whether, but for stress, they would have still set at defiance the promptings that impelled many of their relations, two months ago, on their migration southwards. Surely these were they who had landed in Scotland and would have stayed there! Bunches of five, ten, twenty, and fifty straggled and struggled along, odd birds, fagged right out, alighting now and then to rest awhile. They passed almost within arm's length, many of them. I could have caught them with a landing net; and their line of flight lay between the sea-licked edge of the snowy plain and low-water mark, over a ribbon of clear sand some fifteen yards in width. The silent hosts opened on either side of me as might a regiment of infantry, as I walked north; they did the same as I came back homewards, slightly closing their formation again as they proceeded ahead of me. Unfortunately the morning was gloomy, and my trusty Zeiss glasses a little too powerful for their nearness, so that had the smaller hosts contained rarities, they would have passed on unidentified. I longed to have my smaller "operas," but no gun; for I abominate that spirit which leads to the slaughter of hosts of small migrants for the sake of (reputedly) adding a new species to a county's *fauna*. I would rather spend half my life among the mudflats and not know that some rare and new species of wader was watching *me* daily, than know and name it, if it meant my taking away the life it is as much entitled to as I am to mine! Here the ichthyologist, however sentimental, scores, for all rare and most common fishes are caught *more or less by accident!* He may sit all day, for years, angling from a rock, seeking in vain a *Balistes capriscus*, and to-morrow it may be cast up on the shore by the scornful sea! *Sua cuique voluptas!*

The poor black-headed gulls fared badly enough; they left Breydon *en masse*, and betook themselves to the lower reaches of the rivers. I surprised thirty or more of them by running unexpectedly—to them—up a river-bank, putting them to flight, for a short time, from ink-black sewage water running from a sewer outlet. These birds, too, swarmed the outlying gardens, and alighted on the public roads; people

fed them from the bridges; the kindly disposed spread for them table scraps on their very doorsteps in various parts of the town; but more than one brute made target practice with them. One hapless bird would, or could, not make way for a cyclist, and was accidentally killed by his machine.

Two or three times I visited Breydon walls during the continuance of the frost and snow, but being well aware of my need of self-restraint, I wisely, I think, kept off Breydon itself. Coots in miserable flocks slouched about on the mud-flats, demoralised by incessant slaughter among their ranks. Parcels of wildfowl flew affrightedly to and fro, for every man's gun was turned against them. "Strike" Sharman, a veteran Breydoner, remembering bygone winters, was tempted again to visit the mudflats, and came home with the foredeck of his punt covered with mallards and pochards. I visited his boat-shed on the 30th, and saw a row of pochards and scaups lying on a bench.

"That poor crested grebe," said he, "I picked up exhausted out of a hole in the ice; the tide had fallen, it couldn't dive away, and it couldn't get on the wing."

The poor old eel-pickers and other waterside "spaniels," frozen out from drains and channels, hung dejectedly around the quaysides, or crowded into their "shelter," bewailing the bad times and indulging in reminiscences of similar days in the long ago.

On the 29th I had a look round the Saturday's market. On Edmond's (late Durrant's) game stall I saw a number of mallard and pochards, the latter still in the plumpest condition. A few common snipe hung there too; they were fat enough, although not tempting eager purchasers, but scores (and hundreds of snipe later on) were turned away as thin and unsaleable. On the country-folk's stalls were numerous tufted ducks, pochards, and others. They had been having a fine time on some of the Broads (Hickling in particular), before the fowl were frozen out. Only one jack snipe was noticed in the whole market, but numerous bunches of field-fares, thrushes, blackbirds, and other small birds were on sale, and these found ready customers, which wildfowl did not.

"So you've been killing your friends—the slug-eaters?"

I remarked to a couple of different stall-keepers, touching the dead *blackbirds* with my finger.

"Yow'd think 'em friends, 'bor," said one, "if yow was jist to see 'em among our fruit!"

"Yow'd think so, 'bor," said the other, "if yow saw 'em in summer!"

But neither could tell me where they got their fruit from in winter; but so vindictiveness had slain them, and petulance was exhibited even in referring to them. And as blackbirds are esteemed uncommonly good eating in Yarmouth, no mercy is ever shown them.

On the 30th I called on Halls, an intelligent young engineer, and a good observer of bird-life, whose works overshadow Breydon, and who in summer is ever ready, in motor launch or punt, to show visitors over this magnificent estuary, and who also follows Breydon with a big gun "when there's anything about." He was just sitting down to dinner after a week's wild life on Breydon, and sleeping at night in his snug, roomy houseboat, returning to town only at intervals with his game, for which he found, somehow, a ready sale.

"I closed down (the engineering shed) for the Christmas week," said he, "and have had a week up Breydon, *and haven't done so bad.*" Let me summarise his experiences.

He met with the first lot of fowl on the 23rd, getting several mallard and seventeen coots. On the 24th he killed twenty-five coots at one shot with the big gun, and obtained altogether "two or three linen baskets" of these birds. There must have been quite three thousand coots on Breydon frozen out from the Broads; they kept much in line, like soldiers in a regiment (as I have seen them here before in hard winters), and fed ravenously on the sweet, fattening stems of *Zostera marina.* They made quite an audible scrunching noise in tearing them up. A wretched adult crested grebe sat miserably bunched up on the ice, literally starving; he knocked it over with an oar as he rowed along.

About sixty swans visited Breydon. Sharman killed three, Halls shot one, which he believed to be a Polish swan; and gave me a fairly representative description of it. It was quickly sold for eating. The majority of the swans appeared to be whoopers. Geese had been scarce; five

brents were seen, and a grey-lag goose had been killed. Halls' game list for the week was as follows:—

1 swan	1 teal
34 mallards and ducks	1 golden plover
6 pochards	1 crested grebe
5 wigeons	60 coots

A few golden plovers hung about during the week, but were unusually shy. "Hard fowl," i.e. golden eyes, tufted ducks, and scaups, were seen in small bunches; but they too were shy and wary. So many pochards have not been seen or killed for many years.

The few larger gulls remaining here have been seen chasing unwounded dunlins whenever they happened to fly near them, but these quick-turning little birds are too swift for them; escaped cripples fared worse, however. The hooded crows forsook the Breydon flats and marshes, and kept to the open reaches and the seashore. I saw a dead gull clean picked by them—as much of it as was not frozen into the ice on a ditch. One hungry fellow was observed making strange efforts to get some food down his gullet, but his heart failed him. Prompted by curiosity, the rejected morsel was examined, and found to be a tablet of highly scented toilet soap, much holed by his hard bill in trying to find, if possible, a sweeter kernel! Kingfishers have been observed sitting miserably about on posts and rails, looking abject in their hunger; and even those who usually have no pity were sorry for them. One came and tapped on the window of Halls' houseboat. Whilst out shooting, on one occasion, he left the door of the houseboat open, and a wagtail that had been hanging around for scraps went in and cleared the fragments off his dinner plate.

One day when killing a wounded mallard by cutting its throat, so as not to damage its neck (!) as wringing will sometimes do, the blood dripped and congealed on the snow on the forepeak of the punt. While he was in the houseboat, a hungry starling flew down on the boat, and ravenously ate the crimsoned snow; and when driven away, it returned and ate more of it.

Halls said the 23rd was "a wildfowl day beyond all memory"! Some small return bunches visited Breydon on

the 28th and 29th. The ice formed so rapidly on the night of the 29th that he had to return from the drain to his houseboat, having no ice-hook to cut a way through; but on the 30th he managed to hack his way out to open water.

Mr. J. H. Gurney wrote me on December 26th, and remarked on "flocks of skylarks going seawards." He saw "twenty rooks that day eating a dead sheep." They devour putrid dogs on Breydon, and seem to think nothing of it —indeed, they rather like it! The rooks around Yarmouth kept much to the various outlying gardens, and when not progging for a morsel, sat disconsolately on the topmost twigs of small trees, surveying the miserable outlook, and thinking of happier days. They hunted singly—every bird for himself! Chaffinches fared badly, and looked the most abject of all the finches. On the 27th, as I stood near a rail on Breydon walls, one came to within ten inches of my foot to search a tiny patch of bare soil. The meadow-pipits seemed fairly happy, and hunted most of the time on the weedy edges of Breydon, and along by the river margins. Scamps of boys were to be seen catching, here and there, a miserable bird with a piece of herring lint worked by a string and two sticks.

Many wildfowl were observed on the rivers, where open; and at St. Olaves some big bags were made. One gunner shot a female goosander; and three equally harmless dab-chicks were killed—for no useful purpose. In the neighbouring villages all the berries had been stripped from the hedgerows. Two snipe wandered into a cattle-shed on the marshes, where they probed and prodded among the stable refuse in the hope of finding some stray grub or worm; their footprints in the snow led to their discovery, but on a person carelessly slipping in, they promptly and safely dashed out.

Wild ducks were plentiful enough on Fritton Lake, and big bags were made at the decoys; as many as seven hundred birds, I am given to understand, were netted there in one day. Truly a neck- and arm-aching record! To certain brackish ditches round the west end of Caister, on the edge of the marshlands, ducks persistently resorted, and afforded one individual, who has, since the conclusion of the herring voyage just before Christmas, done nothing but

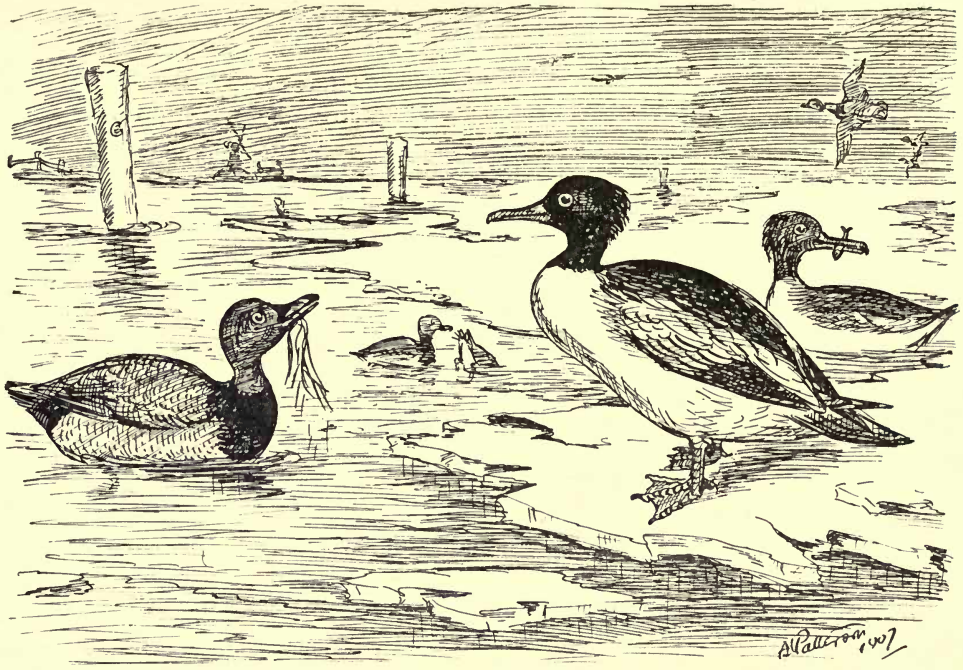
shoot in that particular neighbourhood, unusually good sport. On one occasion he secured a mallard in a most unexpected manner. Hearing an unusual clamour among some tame ducks kept hard by, he went out to see the reason of it. To his astonishment he at length discovered a mallard sitting on the ridge-tiles of an adjoining house. It was but the matter of a few moments to slip back for his gun; and on his prompt return he shot at and killed that venturesome fowl.

When skinning a couple of coots, after they had been feeding for about a fortnight on the *Zostera*, I found them exceedingly plump and fat; their stomachs and intestines were packed with "grass blades" in various stages of digestion: the fresher "grass" still depended from their mandibles. I found a couple of small periwinkles in one of them.

"*Jan. 5th*, 1907.—Yesterday a fine female goosander was brought me for identification; it was shot at Buckenham, up the Norwich river, where during the past two or three days fowl had been abundant. The few goosanders and smews —'sawbills' that visit us in any numbers only in severe weather—appear to have kept off Breydon, although some smews visited the upper parts of it, and frequented the rivers. As usual, most, if not all, of these 'sawbills' were female birds."

I went this afternoon to Belton and St. Olaves, and had a chat with one or two of my friends who like to watch birds—preferably down a gun-barrel. In the washhouse of one hung some coots and ducks, and a bunch of snipe—four common and two jacks. His lad, a young urchin who had just left school to work in a cowshed, passed his noon hours, during the bad weather, near a ditch frequented by snipe. He obtained three or four small spring traps, and placed them in the water where he saw footprints; these snipe were the proceeds of a few hours' "work." The boy's father, a Mr. Brookes, assured me that *thousands* of snipe came to the marshes just before the snowstorm; and they had also haunted the ronds and saltings. They were so put out by its continuance that seven were seen with dunlins on the mudflats.

Brookes assured me he might have shot a pair of smews on the river at Burgh, but being eager to secure a mallard swimming close by, in the end he missed them all. Several



'MID SNOW AND ICE. GOOSANDERS AND POCHARDS

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dabchicks frequented the river there. Geese in flocks of seventeen, twelve, thirteen, and ten respectively, "mostly a darkish-grey sort" (probably bean geese, the most common species here this winter), passed over; and a large hawk, which I have reason to believe was a buzzard, flew out of a stackyard, with straws depending from its feet, and I have no doubt a rat was mixed in amongst them. A large "cloud" of wood-pigeons, containing some hundreds, passed over from the direction of Yarmouth, where another acquaintance of mine saw them a little earlier on the same date—in all probability the same flock.

To-day I saw three birds feeding near Breydon, which I at first believed to be meadow-pipits. On putting them to flight, which they appeared reluctant to take, I noticed an uncommon amount of white on the two outside feathers on either side of the tail. It struck me at the time as being rather unusual, but not being prepared to suspect anything rarer, I paid no more heed to them, and let them alone.

On taking up the current number of the *Zoologist*, I happened to read an article on the water-pipit,[1] and on further reference to Howard Saunders' *Manual*, I was astonished to find how curiously my birds corresponded with the description there given of the species. I went back to the spot, but, as I was prepared to be, was disappointed at not again meeting with these birds. On cautiously introducing the matter and my suspicions to an old and observant gunner, he, strangely enough, spoke of seeing *three* birds a few hours previously at the harbour mouth, near the piles of the breakwater, which he noticed "carried more 'an usual" white on their tails. There the matter for the present must rest, for were I to describe the species to any of those who prowl around with guns, searching for "specimens," not a meadow-pipit would escape the general massacre "rarities" provoke. A new species had better remain unidentified!

"P. W. D. I.," writing to the *Daily Express* of January 5th, 1907, and commenting on the appearance of the wild swans at Yarmouth, remarked :—

"I am informed that there were fifty of the birds, but whether they were whoopers or the smaller Bewick's, word

[1] "The Water-Pipit (*Anthus spipoletta*) as a Visitor to England," by Michael J. Nicoll, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U., *Zoologist*, Dec , 1906, p. 463.

has not reached me. Both species have been seen in the neighbourhood in fairly large flocks during hard winters, when they have been driven south by severe weather in their far northern haunts. Doubtless Mr. Patterson . . . knows all about these latest visitors."

As a matter of fact, I was extremely unfortunate in not seeing any of these swans, dead or alive; and felt called upon to reply to the article in question. As my letter was given almost in its entirety, I have taken the liberty of reprinting it as given by the Editor:—

"Mr. Arthur Patterson . . . sends to the *Express* an interesting account of an attempt to identify a Polish swan, after the bird had been placed in the boiling pot.

"Mr. Patterson, first of all, refers to the flock of wild swans, which were mentioned in the *Express* as having visited Breydon Water, near Yarmouth.

"'On very reliable authority,' Mr. Patterson says, 'I understand that about sixty swans were seen on that delightful old backwater. Unfortunately, I just missed seeing them, and I was equally unfortunate in not seeing the four that were shot —three by one of my acquaintances, and one by another punt-gunner.

"'I have seen as many as fifty at one time, and I can assure you they were a sight worth seeing.

"'The odd bird shot, from a description given me, I took to be a Polish swan; and it was sold to a carnivorous publican for forty-two pence. I saw him just too late, for on visiting his bar, he assured me that the 'missus' had plucked it.

"'Let me see but a foot!' I begged, on which he called the 'missus,' who presently came forward.

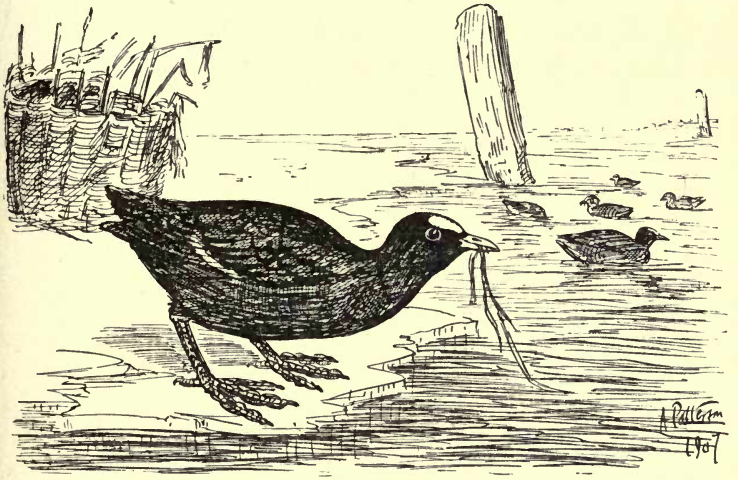
"'Let Mr. Patterson see the head and the feet of that swan!' he said. She apologised, and said that both were in the saucepan, which she ran indoors and fetched, hauling out a foot on a huge fork. But I found boiled swan's foot was an awkward thing to swear the bird's identity by, and would have defied Professor Owen himself!'"

"*Jan. 12th*, 1907.—The weather and bird-life generally have returned to the normal: to-day's market was comparatively birdless. On only one stall was there evidence of anything unusual having occurred for a day or two. A haberdasher named Young (the hero of the whistling ducks) had suspended, amid stockings and underclothing, a large display of coots tied in couples, which he was selling, and freely too, at sixpence a brace. I found them exceedingly

plump and in good condition. These birds appear loth to leave the *Zostera*, and to go back to the Broads; this is the way with them when they have once tasted this succulent vegetable. The day before Young had shot a shag, a most unexpected visitor to Breydon at any time.

"The gulls have now betaken themselves to their usual haunts, although odd birds seem unduly familiar, and still persist in visiting parts of the town where under ordinary circumstances they would not think of going.

"As usual the greatest sufferers during this heavy snow were the redwings, a fact remarked on by observers who, like myself, came to the conclusion that extreme cold, as much as short-



ON EVIL DAYS. COOTS ON BREYDON

ness of food, seriously affects this species; and it was noticeable, too, how in a remarkably short time they drooped and died, while in more protracted frosts, without so much snow, in other years they did not so soon succumb. Numbers were found dead in the surrounding villages, as were some chaffinches; but larks, as they usually do, took to the cottage gardens, and fed freely on the cabbages, to the great undoing of the gardens, and in many instances to their own."

"*Feb. 7th*, 1907.—Owing to the Broads being still frozen and the great liking the coots have acquired for the *Zostera*, a crowd of them still remain on Breydon, and are shot at when breaks in the ice or other 'favourable' circumstances admit of approaching them. Poor things! There are a number of them trailing one broken leg and hopping on the other, as the result of being wounded by stray pellets."

CHAPTER III

MEN AND MANNERS

EARLY in the 90's a large and elaborate volume was written by a naturalist, purporting to give a faithful delineation of men and nature on Breydon waters; but although vigorously written, in parts, it gave us some grossly exaggerated pictures of the hardy men who wrest a precarious living from its depths and its mudflats. To represent these men as drunken and vicious was a distinct calumny. That some of them do frequent taverns in idle moments goes without saying; for they, like others who follow hazardous pursuits much dependent on the moods of the elements, are perforce often idle; and having no fitness for intellectual pursuits and hobbies, they naturally drift to those resorts where warmth, kindred spirits, and congenial converse are assured. One who reads the book I refer to might be forgiven if he imagined the author had gathered much of his information in low bar-parlours, or persuaded men to drink until they were merrily and extravagantly reminiscent. I make this apology for a class of hardy and honest toilers who are no worse than other unskilled labourers; who are often intelligent and observant, and to their credit are as a rule sturdily independent and self-reliant.

The majority of the old Breydoners—aged men as I knew them when a lad—were wholly illiterate and uneducated; they had never been to school. Like generations of their forbears they had tumbled into their fathers' boats, and been made to supplement the family's scanty earnings ere they had picked up sufficient education to fit them for the present-day infant school. Their fingers clasped a boat's oar before some lads of to-day have yet mastered the proper handling of a pen. Their early toddles were to take something to father's boat—his dinner, or a bag of shot; or to carry home some of the fowl that "dad" had killed. They knew the ebbing and

flowing of the tides as boys to-day know the north and south on the map. Sometimes they would go to sea with the shrimpers and help them sort the catches, or hold the tiller while the shrimper manipulated his nets. There was quite a number of mussel-boats, even within recent years, that were worked by a sort of horizontal hand-capstan placed in the bow, which wound the boat up close to some post in Breydon, or to a vessel in the harbour—a dredge scooping in mollusc and rubbish, mud and stones as it dragged along on the bottom. These boats were cut-down lugger's boats, of which the small boy acted as a sort of mate or second hand. Of late years, thanks to the sewage abomination, a medical veto has condemned the mussel, of which myriads people the river and channel-bottoms. Then the boys would borrow an old boat and go up Breydon, with naked legs and dilapidated pails and cans, to gather the winkles that swarm, even to this day, in the *Zostera* on the mudflats. Small fishmongers were ever ready to take all they could gather, and as this was a remunerative pursuit to themselves as well as their elders, they worked industriously at it, getting themselves into a sorry plight with mud and moisture. They would vary the fun by stripping and wading about in the drains in pursuit of flounders which, thirty or forty years ago, were far more abundant than now; they could feel these flatfish gliding about between and around their legs, and would promptly plant a foot upon them, stooping down, often at arm's length, to seize a prisoner with both hands, and adroitly throwing it on the flat, to be bucketed by those remaining upon it. Their pursuit of wounded fowl after the night's shoots I have already described;[1] and as soon as they had strength enough to handle a spare oar, into father's boat they went as a supernumerary hand, to help pull against the tide, or tow the net that encircled the cunning grey mullet or the scented smelt. Soon they helped to mend the old nets, and in time to braid new ones. There were a dozen other incidental pursuits that brought a little grist to the mill, or helped to fill the pot;—lines were laid for eels, mushrooms were found on the marshes just beyond the walls, driftwood was gathered for the fires, and to supply the neighbours, for ere iron supplanted timber, much wood from the shipyards went upstream. There was

[1] *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, p. 37.

"butt-darting," too, in winter, and many a little job to be obtained in helping to overhaul yachts; for Breydon was, until recent years, a favourite sailing-place for quite a fleet of them.

"Charley" Thacker, or "Young Stork" as he was nicknamed, to distinguish him from "Breydon Stork," his father, and "Baker Stork," his brother, who divided his time between his oven at home and his punt at Breydon, told me, when chatting recently beside a comfortable fire, that when he was only fourteen years of age, he shot alone with a big gun carrying three-quarters of a pound of shot, and "that went with a plug-breech and a cap," to distinguish it, in his description, from the flint-guns that were still in use.

Let me introduce Thacker, who is a very fair representative of his class. A little, tough-built, wiry fellow, turning grey at sixty-four—quiet and law-abiding, smelling strongly of tobacco, but of drink knows when he has had sufficient, and has followed Breydon since he was a child. He had passed through all the stages I have just described, and until recently used a punt-gun; but as it was "starwashon bizness" taking out a licence, he sold it not so long ago. To-day he is factotum for a gentleman gunner, and during the warmer months devotes his time to eel-babbing, and his leisure in winter to picking.

He ran over the gamut of the old Breydon gunners, as he well knew them, and some of whom I have recollections of. There was "Poker" Lamb, who gained his nickname undoubtedly by some fluke or great success at pochard killing; for a name is soon obtained, even on some trivial pretext, and it sticks to a Norfolk man the rest of his life. There were "Breton" Lamb and "Salt-fish" Jex, "Silky" Watson, who had a wealth of silken curls, "Pero" Pestell (still alive), "China" Crickmer, of pugnacious memory; "Jimmy" Buttifant, "Old Jack" Bessey, "Pintail" Thomas, his brother "Gabey," "Fiddler" Goodens (still living), and many another who had preceded them. One of the most notorious, and whom I knew well, was "Cadger" Brown, to speak of whom to this day will draw a smile from any Breydoner, for many of his tricks were at their expense. Of him anon.

Thacker's gossip was a lively description of Breydon men and things. "Silky" Watson he knew from the time he left

the fleet—he had been through the Russian war. He was a decent fellow until his mind went wrong, and they had to take his guns from him and "put him away." He was the neatest man at laying at fowl you ever saw: he would lay so close you could not discern anything of him above the gunwale as he sculled on to fowl. He once shot a shelduck, and left it in his (Thacker's) houseboat, just while he did a bit of eel-picking on the flat. When he went to the boat to fetch the duck, out it flew! It had recovered from the shot, which had only stunned it.[1]

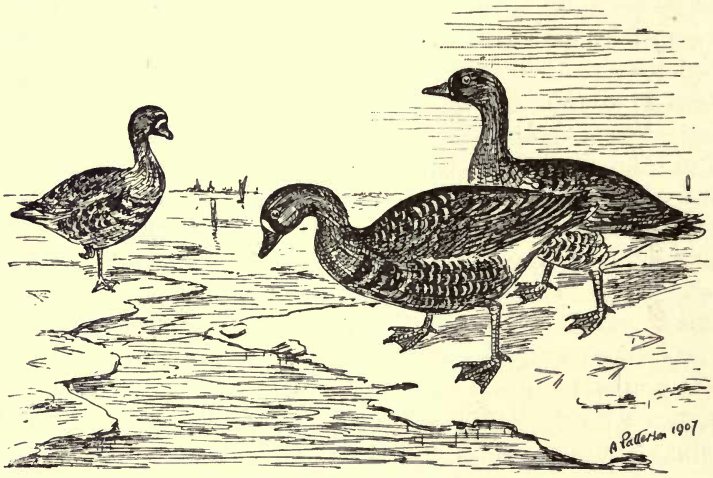
Breydon isn't what it was forty years ago. There was plenty of water then; why, a wherry could make a board from where the railway bridge now is to Rotten Eye, another higher up at Lamb's Rond, and two more higher up, and find itself at Burgh. There had not been a wherry across Breydon, except up Duffell's drain, this twenty years. At Rotten Eye (now dry a long time before low water) there were four and a half feet of water at dead low water thirty-five years ago. And when the wind blew hard from the south-east—straight from Holland—we got plenty of brents, hard fowl (scaups, golden eyes, tufted duck, etc.), and Dutch fowl, a smaller and darker mallard than our own. There was a big reed-bed all along from Lamb's Rond to Rotten Eye, for the water was more constantly fresh, before the present salt rushes were let in by a deepened harbour; and the punt-gunners used to draw into the reeds and quite hide themselves. There were from twenty to twenty-five big guns; and each man took his station, and kept to it. There was no rushing out to get the "best" of another boat; if the fowl left one man's "bit," then, of course, there was nothing to say against it. But woe betide any one who left his place to "best" another; he was likely enough to get a shot at his boat! Thacker had seen twenty-five boats after eels—picking, in Rotten Eye, at one time.

I asked him about "pokers" (pochards) and this strange weed they loved so.

Thacker called it "poker-grass"—tangle, that had a small pea grow on it near the roots—Rotten Eye was full of it. These peas the pochards fed on after pulling up the weed by

[1] Refer to *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, p. 39, wherein a similar incident is narrated of a hobby.

the roots to get at them. He had shot plenty of "pokers" in his time. Only four years ago, the largest flock of pochards he had ever seen dropped into Breydon—some hundreds of them. He was in B——'s gun-punt, and pulled at them with the great breech-loading punt-gun, the cap was bad and misfired; he rowed up after them again, they merely paddled away, and three cartridges did he try, each with a like result; they had bad caps. He had killed forty-eight wigeon (in the early spring) at one big-gun shot, and lost several cripples; this was his biggest shot. He had killed five swans one day at one shot, and secured four swans next



WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

morning. Nine bean geese he obtained on one excursion, and sixteen brents on another; also four white-fronts. Once when laying at thirty swans his gun misfired; and five spoon-bills, very immature ones, he slew at one discharge of his gun. They were so very immature he could scarcely dispose of them. The last couple he sold for a shilling!

Old "Poker" Lamb's wife was a veritable Breydoner. She used to dress in an oily jumper, clap on her head a sou'-wester, and go smelting with her husband. She would take one oar, he the other, and between them they managed to get the net round and ashore. He would get out on to the mud and hold the line, while she rowed out and semicircled the net; then she would throw him her end-rope, and alternately the

old fellow would pull the two ends of it in, his faithful wife "splouncing" the water behind the bight of the net to keep the fish from bolting out.

Thacker called a ripple of water a "brevell," and rough water was a "swell." "Get a wounded poker in a brevell," said he, "and you may lay your life you'll never get it out, for it will lay itself flat just under the water, with only the bill out that much" (measuring the tip of his finger!).

Among the strange captures he had made on Breydon was a hundred and a half of full-grown herrings during the mid-summer fishing season. Turbots and brills up to a foot long he had also taken, and small plaice.

One sharp winter the "stock-ice" came up from below in big lumps, and crabs (*Carcinus mœnas*) came up in thousands frozen in and to it.

"We wasn't much troubled with crabs the next eel-babbin' season—nowadays you can't drop your line in afore you're fast to a crab—confound 'em!" said Thacker.

Fair play, in the old days of many birds and many guns, was an understood thing. When laying for fowl, no man was supposed to cross another's bows, and the first man to arrive on the scene had first choice of place. Although lapses from grace were not unknown, such an incident was remembered for long after, especially if by sharp practice some unusual advantage had been gained. On one occasion Gibbs, when lying in his punt in the middle of Breydon, shot an osprey. The bird, mortally wounded, gradually came down, still pursuing its direction of flight, and landed in a marsh over the south wall. "Silky" Watson, who had been watching from a point near the walls, rowed might and main to get to the bird first and, gun in hand, ran up the bank, detected the bird in the grass, and hurried towards it. It was already dead, but he fired a shot at it as if it were only wounded and making an effort to escape. Gibbs topped the wall in time to see this trick of "Silky's," and a wordy encounter followed. By rights the bird belonged to Gibbs, but, being the weaker man, might defied right successfully, a compromise being arrived at, and a division of the profit being promised; otherwise Gibbs would have got nothing at all. To this day reference to the subject ruffles the temper of poor old Gibbs.

I suppose it is but ordinary human nature that prompts a man to get the better of his fellows; in some professions it would be termed competition, in other walks of life various other terms would signify the same thing. "Pintail" Thomas once told my friend Dye, who was out in his punt seeking victims, that if he went round the corner of the next rond he might get a chance at a fowl. Dye went, and no fowl rewarded his outlook; but meantime Thomas, who *had* seen fowl in an opposite direction, and had thrown his rival off the scent, went and made a successful shot.

In May, 1887, before a watcher had been duly appointed on Breydon, and ere I had given up shooting on principle, I fear I was as sad a poacher as my opportunities allowed me to be. Ben Dye and myself, on a bright, early morning, sallied forth on slaughter bent, should any spring waders be luckless enough to allow a near approach, and we had agreed to divide the spoil—"going halves." We had barely fastened our punt to the timbers of the old ship *Agnes*, in the Ship drain, ere a big gun boomed half a mile away in the Five-stake drain; and looking round I espied four avocets making straight for us. Telling Ben to "look out," I fired at the hindermost bird as they swerved to the left, and brought it down. We rowed excitedly after it, and while gloating over the beautiful thing (!), tossed up which of us was to have fifteen shillings or the bird. The bird fell to Ben, who has it still. But while in the midst of our exultation a punt we had not noticed coming, bumped against ours, and a demand for "our" bird was peremptorily made.

"Your bird!" said Ben, who had slipped it under the box seat out of reach; "how do you make that out?"

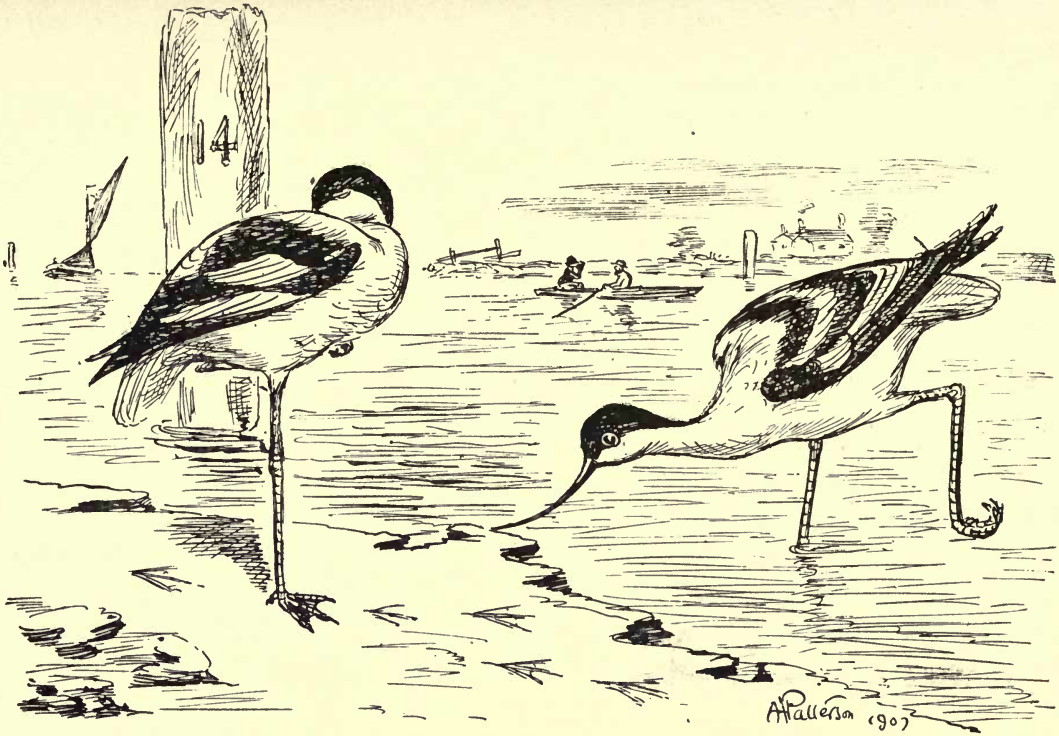
"We shot it!" said Hurr and "Pintail."

We proceeded to argue the point, but the two Breydoners persisted, and began to use language that was more in keeping with the mudflats than with parliamentary ideals; and in their chagrin they threatened summary vengeance. But seeing the threatening attitude of Ben's oar, they thought wiser of it, and suggested we should settle the dispute ashore.

To make matters less complicated, I asked what size shot they had used.

"No. 2's," said Hurr and Thomas in one breath.

"Very well," said I, "I used only No. 5's; and when the



"FORTY WINKS!" AVOCETS

bird is skinned, if any 2's are found in it, we'll come to terms."

To this they reluctantly assented, suggesting, anyway, that we had done them out of a good day's work.

When the bird was skinned, only No. 5's were found; and we have since found out that the two gunners, finding they could not get near enough for a shot, fired a "forlorn" shot, rather than not fire at all.

"Cadger" Brown was a rough fellow, passing harmless, but a waterside Ishmaelite, inasmuch as his hand was against every man. No eel-trunk floating in the stream was ever robbed of its contents but Brown obtained the credit for the exploit; when tame ducks or geese vanished mysteriously from the marshes, it usually happened that he had been seen loitering in the neighbourhood either before or after the event. Did any marsh farmer hope to gather a profitable crop of mushrooms in the morning, "Cadger" was almost certain to be there before him.

His punt, as I knew it, was a shapeless bundle of firewood, on whose decks and sides was nailed much tarred canvas that kept the timbers together, but did not keep out all the water. No one knew when or by whom it was built. He used to "bab" and shoot on Breydon, and spent many of his nights on adjoining marshes and rivers. One night in the 70's, when hares were yet game and abounded on the marshes, he ventured up the Bure with another kindred spirit—a man who had left Norwich because his poachings were too well known. They shot three hares that night, after the moon got out, and came home. A policeman, suspicious of their movements, came to overhaul the boat, but Brown had just time enough to slip the hares into an eel-trunk and drop it overboard, where it floated innocently enough. This happened to be the only part of the fixtures P.C. Searchlight failed to examine. On another occasion "Cadger" had shot a hare on the marshes, and found the keeper in pursuit of him. He came away in a great hurry on the ebb tide, and as soon as he landed, hastily secured a pot of red lead, and painted the boat all over. When the keeper arrived in town next morning and came to look for a certain "dark coloured" boat, he could not swear that Brown's, which answered in every particular but the colour of it, was the boat he had seen on the previous evening. Such

are examples of the many strange doings that were related of him in his day; but Brown's poachings and pilferings have long since ended, and he has joined the "great majority" of Breydoners.

The "last of the punt-gunners" proper was "Johnny" *alias* "Pintail" Thomas, who died in the Fishermen's Hospital in 1901. Thomas, like most of his congeners, was born of a Breydon sire, his father and grandfather having lived, and one of them died, on Breydon. His earliest associations centred in and around his father's old flint-lock punt-gun, the mullet and smelt nets, and other paraphernalia of their calling; and he was rocked as much in the punt as in the cradle. When old enough, like most of his class, he went to sea in fishing boat and smack, and when tired of that rough, wild life, took to pursuits, and lived amid scenes hardly less rough and wild. He followed Breydon assiduously for nearly all the thirty-odd years I knew him. As a boy his shop-window was a kind of wonderland to me. Meat was sold on one side and vegetables on the other, fronting them being huge dishes, sometimes empty, but often full and piled with knots, turn-stones, dunlins, and ringed plovers, that had been slain by "Johnny." Rows of gulls, ducks, and curlews adorned the hooks outside. The rarer birds that fell to his gun were always in demand by certain collectors and dealers, and a brisk trade was occasionally done in the commoner fowl for the table. The gulls, when there was no demand for their wings and plumage by millinery firms, were stripped of their feathers for the making of pillows, etc.; and the smaller ones went into John's saucepan. Before the close season was instituted, Thomas shot all the year round, except on Sundays; but the sight of an avocet or a spoonbill was too much even for his scruples, and he fell from grace, and sneaked out after them. Long after close times had been ordained, he would take sly shots, and by some means smuggle home rare birds, and birds in their nuptial attire, well knowing there were methods of disposal, and buyers always ready to take them.[1] But close time was a death-blow to the professional gunner, although the altered conditions of Breydon, the drainage of the surrounding lowlands, added to the constant noise and turmoil of traffic all round the estuary

[1] Vide *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, pp 40–43.

by rail and by steamboat, have all militated against that quietude so beloved by birds, and what is quite essential—abundance of food. Birds in winter or in immature plumage are comparatively worthless to the collector, from whom the latter-day puntsmen derived their greatest profit; and in winter they are so uncertain in their visits that they could not depend on shooting as a means of livelihood. Then, too, latterly there has been a falling-off in "gentleman gunners," who prefer to go to more bird-frequented haunts; and the puntsman's office as pilot and factotum became lost. In Thomas's time almost all the old gunners had cleared out guns and appurtenances,and the men, compelled still to follow Breydon, being useless for work ashore, turned their attention to eel-babbing, eel-picking, and smelting. Several whom I knew ended their days in the Union. Yet so strong is the fascination of this rough outdoor life, that there are still a number of men pursuing it, and there are lads following in their footsteps, for there is often profit enough to weigh against the uncertainties and disappointments attendant on the nets.

"Pintail" Thomas's old punt-gun was fairly typical of some used on Breydon. It had once been a flint-lock, and on the coming in of the percussion cap had been altered at the breech, as some others had been; but for some years the lock had become so weak that the trigger would refuse to crack the patch unless persuaded two or three times, while at times it refused to explode it at all. Thomas was prepared against this, and always carried a piece of bent iron, part of an old swivel's knee. This was used as a hammer, and the cap cracked by means of it. Needless to say, birds sometimes benefited by this cumbersome and unsportsmanlike method of procedure. Thomas was fortunate in his last years, when racked by gout and the legacies of his old hard life, in going into "dry dock" in the Old Fishermen's Almshouses, where, until his death, a roof and a weekly allowance sufficient for his needs were assured him. Most of his old chums had preceded him to the workhouse, and some of them have gone there since. Poor old fellows! They seem quite resigned to this ignominious finale. I have found them cheery and reminiscent when I have visited them, and sat by them, loading their pipes, and talking of Breydon's departed

glories. It is the old man's delight to live in the past—and to grumble!

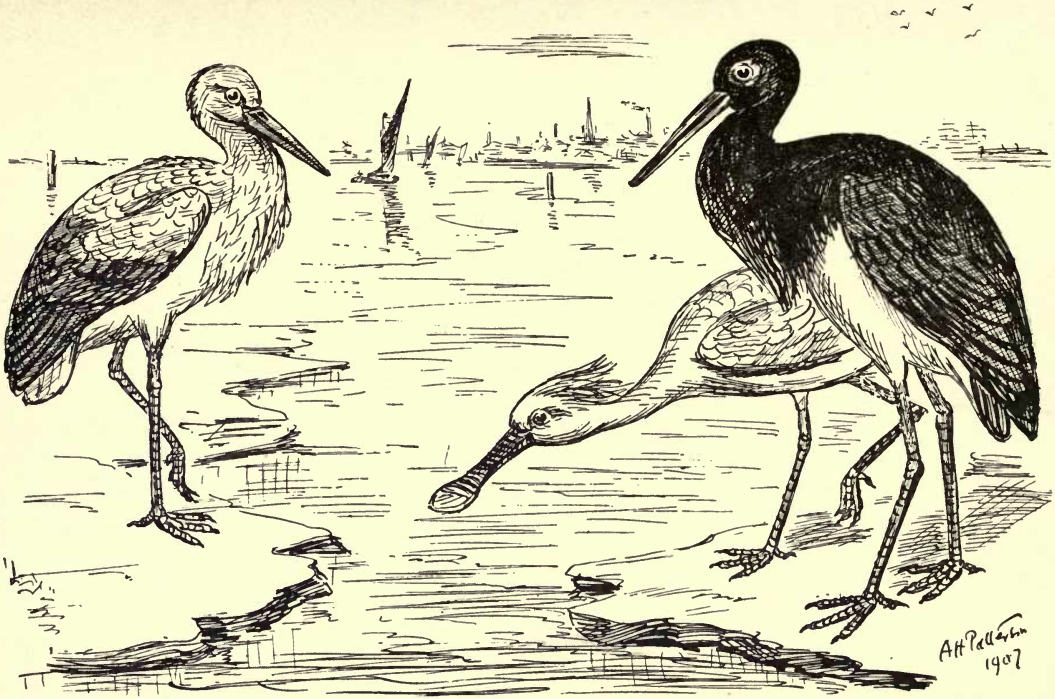
To-day, only one man may be termed a semi-professional punt-gunner, one Fred Clarke, a sturdy, brown-visaged Breydoner, whose face is wrinkled and scored by hard knocks and exposure. But he has to supplement the few short months of wildfowling by various jobs ashore—millwrighting, gate-building, and rough, marsh-farm carpentry. A veritable recluse he lives, summer and winter, in his snug little house-boat on Banham's rond, within hail of my own, and seldom goes up to town save to dispose of his game, or to lay in fresh stores for himself and gun. He is brimming over with bird-lore and, but for his inaccessibility, would be a perfect boon to the amateur naturalist and penny-a-liner who might be fortunate enough to interview him.

There are some half-dozen amateur punt-gunners to be found, at intervals, gliding along the runs and drains of Breydon, ready to "lay" at any small bunch of knots or curlews, or even a single fowl, although occasionally they fall in with unexpected numbers, and surprise themselves and others by their skill and strange good luck! Also, there are always punts containing amateur shoulder-gunners, who are popping incessantly on every hand directly a few flocks of small waders have been seen on the flats, and these would be more numerous had not the addition of March and August to the close-season months made sport scantier than ever for them.

Before closing this chapter it may be interesting to mention the fact that, notwithstanding that every old Breydoner was called by some pet nickname, and in many instances known by no other, they were always extremely sensitive to anything they considered approaching to ridicule. An amusing instance occurred some years since when my friend Mr. G. F. D. Preston, who was then interested in local sport, came off Breydon and landed on the Bowling Green overlooking the estuary. He had observed a stork on the mudflats, and, turning to one of the Thackers, known as the "Breydon Stork," remarked:—

"*There's a stork on Breydon!*"

Thacker made no remark, but stared at Mr. Preston, who, thinking he did not quite understand him, repeated the



DISTINGUISHED VISITORS. BLACK AND WHITE STORKS AND SPOONBILL

information. Thacker coloured up and, turning on his heel, walked away, to my friend's amazement, who shortly after, to his great amusement, remembered the coincidence of names. "Had it been any one but a gentleman gunner," said Thacker to a chum—"*Well!*" By which remark it was to be inferred the Breydoner would have found his tongue—with a vengeance, for he had a rich and varied vocabulary at hand, and could on occasion surprise even those who knew him best.

A gossip with one other ancient Breydoner, still living, but who is feeble and exceedingly deaf, may be mentioned.

Jack Gibbs recently sat by my fireside and made himself very much at home.

"Sixty year ago," said he, "small parcels of ruffs, with frills on, used to frequent that little hilly bit of ground near the old ashen tree.[1] It was very amusin' to see 'em fight: very funny to see 'em dancing round each other, like so many bantam cocks; but they didn't hurt one another—it was all 'show'; they didn't even make the feathers fly, and I never know'd 'em ever to draw blood.

"Breydon altered? I should think so. You know the North Wall drain? Well, I often had nets set in it—the water used to be quite fresh, and there was plenty of it—and I caught roach and perch and bream by the maund full[2] with the butts (flounders).

"I was babbin' one night near the 'London boat,' and caught an eel about three-quarters of a pound in weight, and noticed a lump in it. On skinnin' it I turned out a clay pipe with a bit of the shank attached. No doubt some one had dropt it, and the eel seized on it, as fish sometimes will seize strange things movin' in the water. I caught a quarter-pound eel once on a hook, and outside that eel I found a larger one, nearly two pounds weight, that had been *hooked* through the first one and couldn't clear itself.

"There *were* queer accidents sometimes on Breydon. Old 'Chivvers' Parmenter, who shot there long afore my time,

[1] A well-known landmark that for many years reared its head on a marsh adjoining the New Road, near the railway signal-box. It was blown down a few years since during a heavy gale.

[2] A maund is a large wicker basket, used during the herring fishery season to carry herrings from the luggers to the fish wharf for sale. These baskets often float up Breydon.

once, when rowing along, spotted a parcel of mallard coming towards him; he up with his great old hand-gun and pulled at them, but the patch only cracked, and when the ducks doubled back in their flight, one of 'em striking its wing on the back of another dislocated it, and fell into the water, whereupon Parmenter promptly retrieved it.

"I was originally an oily-clothing maker, but took to Breydon when makin' sou'-westers didn't pay so well: I'd always been used to a gun."

Many facts related by Pestell and one or two other punt-gunners already mentioned, were corroborated by Gibbs as he talked of tides and mudflats and pochard grass, and many other things. The life of vigilance led by these men has conduced to habits of keen and trustworthy observation.

Sixty-four years ago—when he was sixteen—"Fiddler" Goodens "took" to Breydon, where he has shot and fished until the last year or two. I looked in on the old gentleman, who still keeps his two ancient, converted rifles hung up in his room, to remind him of bygone days. The kindly help of friends and the parish allowance are all that stand between him and that goal which all independent old men abominate. He was very chatty over the guns he had known; one particular weapon had belonged to Squire Berney—it was an old plug-breech. It came to him (Goodens) and was sold to Mr. Bellin, from whom it went to Reed (a gunner), who put a patent breech in it, It was then sold to Bly, who now has it. It would kill ducks at one hundred yards, as was proven by staking down or anchoring some tame ones at a shooting contest, Goodens killing two in two shots at the measured distance.

Fifteen godwits at one shot was Goodens' favourite "kill." He had seen many thousands in one day—"years ago" on Breydon. Fowl were then so plentiful that ones and twos were passed unheeded. They wanted bunches; and cripples, especially among "hard fowl," were seldom troubled about, although it was a constant practice with men to scour the walls and gather the wounded by the aid of dogs, which scented them among the flint stones.

Phalaropes astonished him by their chicken-like tameness, and he it was who shot the grey seal near Rotten Eye. He

shot it in the head—"*the blood flew yards!*" He finally dispatched it with an oar and sold it for thirty shillings.

Both woodcocks and French partridges he had seen drop into Breydon in foggy weather, and two or three times he had retrieved hares that had attempted crossing the ice and fallen into wakes between.[1]

The hardest old man of Breydon he ever knew was "Salt-fish" or "Miser" Jex. In the coldest weather, when the boat gathered hundredweights of ice, and the punt-gun was encased in a mass of ice from the spray and moisture, "his great hairy chest" would be all exposed. He would always remark that "the weather never hurt any one." His face was the most wrinkled of any man I ever knew.

During a continuity of severe frosts the Broads became thickly frozen over, and the many coots which people these lagoons are sadly put-to for a means of livelihood. At such times they will take to estuaries, and feed on what marine or semi-marine plant-life comes in their way. A large flock will come to Breydon to feed on the *Zostera*, and offer to local sportsmen an irresistible temptation to harass them. The old gunners eagerly pursued them during the earlier period of their visit, ere they had become rank; for coots were their own favourite game. More than one have told me of the "fun" they have had in pursuing these birds, and the pleasures of the table afterwards.

"Short 'un" Page and "Gabey" Thomas were out one day among the ice, and saw a large bunch of coots in a "wake.' They could not get sufficiently near to them; so, being unprepared in the matter of stockings to put over their boots, they took off their woollen gloves and stuck their boots into them. They got the boat on the ice, little "Short 'un" getting into it to manipulate the gun, while Thomas pushed the boat, sledge-like, within range. They secured twenty-five coots, which they killed, another gunner soon after retrieving eight of the wounded. The average Breydoner was certainly resourceful!

Rime frosts and fogs may be somewhat interesting to those who ramble along the Breydon walls, but neither of

[1] In December, 1906, a hare was observed in great straits in the soft ooze of Breydon. It had evidently been pursued, and mistaking the mud for solid ground had attempted crossing. It was shot while vainly struggling to extricate itself, its long legs having become fast in the ooze.

these conditions of weather is welcomed by those who would punt thither, for it is by no means easy for even an old Breydoner to find his way about—a moment of inattention, a turn of the tide, and his bearings may be lost entirely. I was rowing up one night to my houseboat, which just then was moored to the old ship *Agnes*, in the Ship drain, and I had come to within two stakes of the entrance to the drain, navigating the place easily enough by the town lights, when all on a sudden one of the densest fogs I can remember came down obliterating everything, even the bow of my boat, and it was only by a series of random strokes that I found one of the channel stakes, whose number I could not see. Over and over again I tried to find the entrance to the drain, but was continually foiled by fouling the mudflats; so I gave it up for a bad job, and fastened the punt to the next stake I touched, and lay-to for the tide to ease, and the ebb to come down. I snugged myself down as comfortably as possible on the floor of the punt, and amused myself by thinking of other strange adventures that had befallen me on Breydon. I do not remember to have slept, but towards the small hours of the morning I noticed the tide had changed, and a long ripple of phosphorescent water marked the edge of the stream pouring out of the drain into the main channel, *almost within an oar's length of my punt.* I knew at once that I had been moored at the entrance of the channel all the time! It was now but the matter of a few minutes' rowing upstream to the *Moorhen*, into which I tumbled, heartily glad to light a rousing fire and make a comforting supper.

Old Pestell once started to go up Breydon in a thick fog in the depth of winter, and had only just reached the end of the Knowle, when his boat touched against that of the late Fielding Harmer.

"Hallo! Pestell!" said Harmer.

"Hallo! master!" returned Pestell. "Where are you bound for?"

"I'm trying to find Duffell's drain [a mile away]," replied Harmer. "How far am I off it?"

"You're within a stone's throw of home!" said Pestell.

Wildfowling under such circumstances as these is extremely dangerous. I know of an instance where a punt-gunner was levelling his gun at an object which he thought

was a swan, when a ringing sneeze from the said object stayed his trigger finger, but only in the nick of time. This white target turned out to be no other than the late "Punt" Palmer, who, to make himself inconspicuous against the white snow on the flats, had gone out shooting with a white jumper on.

Crowther once shot at a bunch of fowl on the other side of which, at an equal distance, "Salt-fish" Jex was lying. The fowl were badly damaged, and so was Jex, who presently rowed up with shots in his scalp that had penetrated a thick fur cap.

A certain parson, at one time resident at Burgh Castle, had a flock of geese of an extremely roving disposition; they roved about the marshes, and flew about Breydon with the greatest of assurance, becoming well known to all who frequented the place, and provoking many an envious thought.

One foggy evening "Pero" Pestell cajoled Sam Gibbs, another kindred spirit, into an attempt on this adventurous flock, and together they started out in quest of them. They pulled round the North Wall as far as the Dickey Works without meeting with them, but they meant to have a shot if possible. Coming back the same way, Pestell had his suspicions aroused, and laying at his "sights" struck two or three fusees on the stock of the gun, and presently located the "cacklers" on the stone bank against Lamb's rond.[1] They hastily fluttered into the water, and began swimming towards the flat. Again Pestell "lay" to his gun, pulling off the oakum which kept the nipple dry, but unfortunately bringing away the cap with it. The geese bunched up and lifted themselves on the wing, but "Pero" was too quick for them, for he had at once put on another cap, and fired into the bunch of them, killing seven. They were gathered up and brought home.

Early next morning Pestell went up Breydon again in quest of some teal that were reported there, which he found and fired into, afterwards rowing over to the south rond to retrieve one or two of the wounded. On the walls he saw James Hurr and "Jimmy" Reece, who had found two of the wounded geese with broken wings.

[1] Since demolished by the tides.

"*That made nine!*" said Pestell, narrating the adventure to me.

Higher up the walls, Pestell met a manservant from the parsonage, who inquired if he had seen the parson's geese, telling him there was a "rare row" up at Burgh about the job, for only a few had come home, and they were bleeding, and woefully ruffled in plumage.

"Pero" was by no means unalarmed at this, but said nothing incriminating about himself or Gibbs. On arriving home he went to the late Lawyer W——, who was well disposed toward him, and told his story.

"Look here," said Lawyer W——, pointing to a bill stating that "five pounds reward for information respecting some gunner, or gunners, maliciously," etc. etc. Pestell begged the bill to show to his chums; and was advised to get Gibbs to go and claim the reward, and he (the lawyer) would do his best for them, and would share the reward equally among them. But the pair of sportsmen thought it best to hold their peace, and as they shared the geese among those Breydoners who were in the secret, no one gave the game away. And there the matter ended.

"I kept one for myself," said Pestell, "but good night! I couldn't get my teeth into it!"

* * * * * *

IN A BREYDON PUNT SHED

At the entrance of Breydon, on the south side, stands a range of boat and yacht sheds, the latter now frequently in disuse, owing to the falling-off of Breydon in late years as a favourite yachting resort. The great swing-bridge thrown across that narrowest part of Breydon which, even at its best, was always a ticklish part to negotiate on certain winds, has damped altogether the yachtsman's ardour, which had for years been on the wane. Yachting folk to-day prefer the Waveney and the Bure with the adjacent Broads. But several of these sheds are now used by punt-gunners, who find them exceedingly convenient. They usually boast a little cabin which opens into the punt-shed, fronting which is a slide furnished with rollers for easy exit and hauling.

Some of the cabins are characteristically fitted up; and within them, on idle days, when Breydon does not invite them, these hardy, honest fellows draw together and discuss things avine, piscine, and maritime. One who is interested in the wild life of our local waters, and who has gained their confidence, may find in their society much entertainment, and listen to many an interesting yarn.

I found the boathouse door of Number 4 unfastened, and thin, blue smoke curling out of a tall tin chimney. It was a bitter cold January Sunday afternoon in 1907—the tide was running out, and "Strike" Sharman, with his son William, had been out among the ice in the grey morning, and done execution among the wildfowl. They, and one or two others, were recounting their doings of the morning, and comparing present days with the past. Considerably more than fifty years had "Strike" known Breydon; he had been all his life a ship-caulker, and lamented that, since the days of iron ships, things had got slow enough in the caulking line.

"Yes," said I, "I can remember, as a youngster, the clink-clink of the caulking tools in the early morning, before the noise of traffic deadened its music. There is no sound on earth that one can compare with that queer *clink-clink, clinking!*" And I can recall vividly the strange scene of vessels heeled over until their keels came up to the surface, and the rows of blue-jacketed caulkers working on them, who were quite a community by themselves; but to-day it is a rare thing to see a wooden ship undergoing repairs.

"You've seen strange things on these hulls," I remarked.

"Aye!" said "Strike." "I've seen great goose barnacles that long (measuring on his arm), and mussels and weeds covering these ships' bottoms, and fish pulling at them. I've dipped my arm in after grey mullet that were feeding on the green weed and things, but 'though I've touched 'em I never could lay hold of one."

"I've seen as many as eight mullet in my time," jibed in William, the son, "after we've docked a ship and pumped the dock out, laying kicking on the bottom."

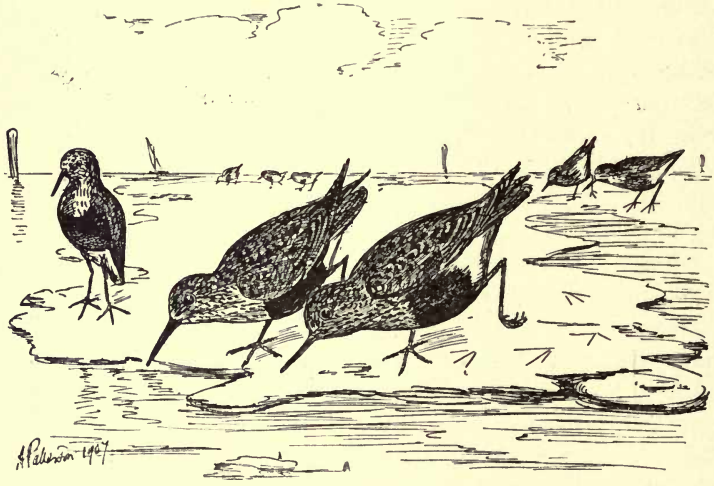
While they were lighting up pipes again, I could not resist taking stock of the cabin. On shields hanging on the varnished wall were sundry heads, wings, and feet of wild-

fowl, shot by the big gun hanging in slings in the boathouse. I noticed among them "members" of the brent goose, shoveler, mallard, and pochard. Here and there hung a little sporting print, shoulder-guns, sou'-westers, boots, oily jumpers, and all the paraphernalia of the wildfowlers.

"I was never a regular Breydoner, you know," said "Strike"; "but have only followed it up on idle days and in hard weather, which meant the same thing——"

"And Sundays!" I edged in, smiling, pointing to a little heap of mallard in a corner.

"Strike's" biggest shot, so far as numbers were concerned,



DUNLINS

was obtained one night when up "under the moon." Frost had just set in, and shore birds were crowding south. He saw a huge gathering of dunlins on the "ship lumps," and fired his shoulder-gun at them. After each shot the poor bewildered things dropped down again among the dead and wounded. After the third shot he secured two hundred and forty-two of them, without counting the cripples which scrambled away.

"I was up Breydon one day making for the old *Agnes*," said Sharman. ("I've caulked *her* in my time!" he interjected.) "There was a body of ice in the channel, and I thought I'd lay beside her for shelter; for she stood high out of the water, and was decked then, as you know. But

all on a sudden the wind chopped to the nor'ard and west'ard, and away comes the whole body of ice, moving directly on her. I hurried towards the open channel for fear of getting jammed in; but I see the ice strike her on the bow—tons of it—and come sliding about the decks, and right over the stern of her. I never see such an avalanche!"

"If you——"

"Well, if I'd stopped, theer'd have been a smash-up, of course; but I was best out of it," said Sharman.

"I remember one night in October," remarked William, "the air abovehead seemed alive with golden plovers, and I heard some cries that tickled my fancy; I couldn't for the life of me make 'em out. The whistle was shriller than a redshank's. The wind was south-east. I went up early next morning and fell in with the strangers; and the flats were crowded with plovers. Ten tall birds were standing in the water and I pulled at 'em, knocking over seven. I found two of 'em were greenshanks, and the other five were spotted shanks. A queer time of the year for 'em."

"One of the funniest things I ever see," said "Strike," "was a couple of kestrels chasing a gull; they dashed at him right and left, and there was he, dodging and screaming, till at last he took to the water and, looking up, opened his beak at them. I could see his little trick; he was after nabbing hold of 'em, and drowning 'em. And I see a crow seize a wounded stint (dunlin), when away comes a big gull at him afore he could make off with it, and made him drop it. The gull gobbled up the poor stint, feathers and all, the Kentish crow standing, like a fule, a little way off, looking at him! I once knocked down a kitty (black-headed gull) when gulls was fetching threepence each for hats, and crows (rooks) as high as eightpence, when down dashed a great black-backed gull and snatched it out of the water, and bore it over to the flats and ate it!"

The Sharmans' record winter was that of 1890–1. During the long spell of frost they were enabled to devote their time to wildfowling, and made a bag of some five hundred wild-fowl (ducks).

"And somebody got writing to the papers about the *slaughter!* They'd better by half have let us poor men alone, who were glad to earn a shilling by it, and turn their

attention to decoymen, who sometimes wring as many necks as that in a day!"

From one thing to another we rambled on—of birds, and boats, and men, for there seemed no end to their reminiscences.

"Did I know 'Cadger' Brown?" said "Strike." "I should like to know who didn't! There was one thing about him: he was always merry, and if he'd got nothing but a crust and a pipe of tobacco he didn't grumble. But I don't tell you he didn't mind getting a good jint when it came in his way. I and Bond were out early one morning and see 'Cadger' coming from the marshes over the walls to his old boat, with something tucked under his coat.

"'Got anything?' asked Mr. Bond.

"'Only an old goose,' said "Cadger," grinning, 'an old goose what was robbin' the poor hosses of their grass,' and he showed it to us.

"'*It's a tame one!*' said Mr. Bond, laughing at the man's audacity, and his ready tongue.

"'Never mind,' replied "Cadger," 'he'll eat all right, all the same for that!'"

And "Cadger" went off with his goose, no one besides Sharman and Bond ever being the wiser.

Of such variety are the yarns of these men of iron nerves and constitutions. They are keenly observant fellows, sturdy of heart as of limb, quick to see a joke, slow to take offence, self-reliant to a degree, and the majority of them are self-respecting. And even their vices, what few they possess, are manly.

* * * * * *

On the eastern bank of the River Bure, within a stone's throw of Breydon, stands a big wooden shed known as the Shrimpers' Shelter. On rough, stormy days these sturdy shrimpers, Breydoners, and other waterside labourers—bronzed, hearty fellows, with the blood of vikings coursing through their veins—repair to this shed to gossip and spend around a glowing stove their enforced hours of idleness, glad to repair thither when tides are wrong and pockets are nearly bare, rather than haunt the quayside inns.

It occurred some years ago to a good old friend of mine, a Mr. Flaxman, who is connected with the Congregationalists, to

approach these fellows, and see if their Sundays could not be spent in something more stirring than idleness.

"We don't want no parsons nor policemen in our shelter!" said one of the crowd, who with his fellows afterwards took solemn counsel, with many deep-drawn spells at their beloved pipes.

"I say, Mr. Flaxman," said one of them a few days after, "I thort you was comin' to talk to us chaps at the shelter last Sunday; but you didn't turn up."

This was enough for my friend, who possesses more than a fair share of humour and a deep knowledge of these men's ways, for he was reared among them; and next Sunday he was installed as the "little parson," and these simple-hearted fellows, who could never gather courage to go to church, mustered up, some thirty of them, sunburnt and weather-stained, in blue guernseys and tanned jumpers, with their indispensable pipes in their mouths, with which they soon filled the place with smoke. Tactfully my friend chatted to them, often in the vernacular, without ceremony and restraint, spicing his talk with anecdote and proverb and a simple story from the Bible.

To this day these honest fellows attend the "little parson's" services, reverent amidst their clouds of smoke, in this unconsecrated hut, sometimes punctuating the missioner's address with piquant comments, or breaking his discourse to get back to some previous remark on which they want more light or corroboration. Often these characteristic interjected remarks, to every one else but themselves, would be very funny, although uttered with all sincerity. And it is no uncommon thing for the congregation to ask their "bishop," after he has concluded his address, to "go on and give us another."

CHAPTER IV

BREYDON IN SPRINGTIME

A MARCH EXCURSION

TARDY springtime comes to Breydon full of caprice and with varying humours. One day you may push your punt afloat on an unrippled tide, with insufficient breeze to belly your little lugsail; and an overcoat becomes burdensome with the lightest of oars. Twenty-four hours later may see the sky overcast with a dull grey curtain, and the cold north-easter, strengthening as the day wanes, reminds you of November. Rain, hail, and snow come by turns, occasionally even until the merry month of May is with us.

In April, 1904, Breydon put on a most uninviting aspect; some of my "notes" for the month are as follow :—

"*April 7th.*—This is Thursday—so far Easter week has been too rough for a trip on Breydon. It is blowing from the N.N.W. Over the clear, raw, yellowish sky broken and lumpy clouds are hastening. The water is like polished pewter—silver-white here and there; and in the channel the blast freckles the ebb tide with bars of white edged waves, hissing strangely as they speed towards and break upon the flint-stone wall. The gulls sit head to wind on the flats, looking by no means happy; and a bunch of dunlins, scattered to feed on the flat near the Five-stake drain, seem equally depressed."

"*8th.*—First time I dared to go on Breydon this week; very poor tide. Saw six geese, also fifty or sixty wigeon; and a flock of dunlins, many of them as yet grey and white as in winter. Probably they are the later hatched young of last year. Saw one grey plover, and one oyster-catcher."

Jary, the Breydon watcher, who sways his sceptre over the vast area of mudflats during the close season, brings up his houseboat at the close of February and moors it by four stout guy-ropes to four sturdy poles driven deeply into the

mudflats, and to a stout chain-cable and anchor—and he has need to!—in a snug corner where a cross drain empties itself at the entrance of Duffell's larger drain. From here he commands a view up and down Breydon. Usually his Noah's Ark is a cosy little place, and it is pleasant to sit on the settle by the fireside, opposite him, and chat of Breydon and its folk-lore, listening meanwhile to the hissing of eels in the fry-pan, and the wail of the wildfowl outside. It is not always so comfortable here when the north wind beats with fury upon the boat, and the flood tide pushes up against it, nor when blow the keener north-east blasts, in whose breath drifts the twirling snowflakes, for not with all Jary's stoking, and rolling among the blankets, can the long night be made comfortable; and day after day of chilling rainfall, with seldom a kindred spirit to converse with, makes the man's isolation as complete as if he were billeted in some lone lighthouse, or were tossing in the night watches on a floating light. Yet when the atmosphere is not blurred with sleet and drizzle, he is within binocular range of his homestead out there beyond the marshes.

Blowy weather makes Breydon look its wildest, when the sky is murky and overcast; the racing flood tide is muddy and troubled, and the black, hummocky clouds tumble up from the horizon and pass overhead in panoramic succession.

"Likely to be a rough night, Jary!" I remarked, as the punt's nose bumped against the side of his houseboat.

"About time we had a change, 'bor!" replied Jary, clutching the painter, and fastening it to the fender-rope running round his craft. A rattling shower came down as I stepped inside and hastily pulled-to the half-door of his cabin. The flowing of the tide had ceased, and before very long a stake outside, easily seen from the cabin window, and which serves Jary for a tide-gauge, began to show up above the surface of the water at intervals, as the fretted waves broke choppily. A laggard wherry or two passed upstream, hoping to make Burgh before nightfall, for the wind was favourable to them.

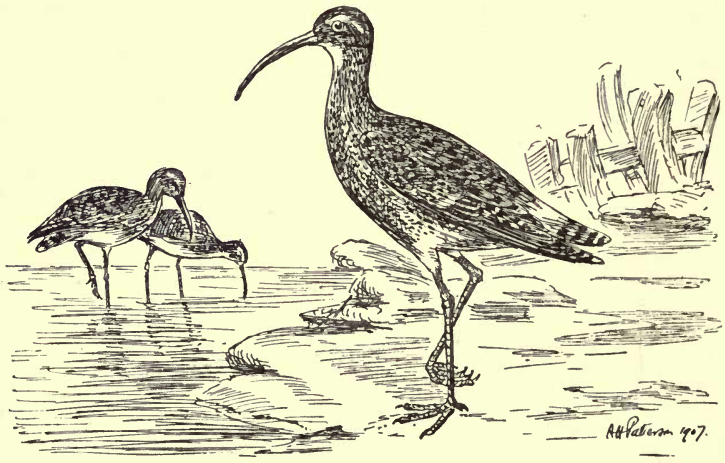
The breeze strengthened as the daylight waned, and strings of great "grey" gulls passed "upward," while two or three whimbrel clamoured noisily as they changed their feeding quarters and called to their fellows across the flats.

"Noisy old birds—them 'Maybirds,'" said Jary; "there's at least a couple of score of 'em hereabouts. They seem to come here more numerously every spring."

"Glad to corroborate you," I said, turning over a fat eel in the pan, and pitching in another lump of dripping.

"Look here," said he, hauling out a broken-winged dead whimbrel from under a sack at the end of the settle. "I picked that up this mornin' against the south wall. I'd like to have catched the fule as knocked that out. I suppose some one had a shot at 'em on the marshes last night as they passed over."

And most likely Jary was right, for I must acknowledge



ON THE ALERT. WHIMBREL

that, as far as Breydon is concerned, the local gunners who frequent the place in the open season have respect for the Protection Acts, much as they object to them; and it is a rare thing indeed to hear the report of a fowling-piece, except on the marshes, from March to August, when, of course, duck-shooting breaks the long spell of gun-rusting, and worries the watcher into redoubled vigilance. Jary is not disliked by the fraternity, who, although they may abominate his vocation, respect him for his honesty of purpose. Some will frankly admit that "if he didn't earn the money, some one else might have to," which is sound logic.

It was not unpleasant to feel the old boat rocking like a

cradle, and tugging now and again at her moorings, and to listen to the waves lapping and gurgling around her; but things began to be less erratic as the tide fell off the flats, and the boat lowered herself by degrees as the water poured out of the drain. The wind still hummed mournfully—I rather liked it—around the chimney, and rattled the poles and gear lashed upon the roof outside.

From cupboard and "frail" and pan and saucepan came forth excellently fried eel, cooked potato, bread, and table requisites, and a right royal supper we made, plain and homely, substantial and sweet, for which, and a sharpened appetite, we were duly thankful. Besides the eels, we had a half-score of dainty smelts, and a few not despicable viviparous blennies that had been scooped in yesterday in Jary's draw-net up the Duffell's drain.

Pleasant chat and note comparison passed away a profitable hour, and long before moon-up two tired Breydoners lay and remained sound asleep on either settle until the rocking of the boat woke us early in the morning, when the waves came rollicking over the submerged flats and lapped her into dancing once again.

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IN THE WATCHER'S ARK

The morning broke fairly fine, and the rain had ceased; so while Jary saw to the frying of some rashers of bacon, and got the coffee on the way, I stepped outside and had a look round with his glasses. By this time the flat eastward of us had begun to show bare in places near the edges. It is odd, to me, that the flats generally are slightly higher at their margins. Not infrequently have I essayed to quant my way across in shallow water on an ebb tide, and managed easily till within a few yards of some tide-worn drain, and then stuck within boat's length of it. I have had to off boots and socks in a twinkling and shove right merrily, for every minute is precious. To a novice a little delay then may mean staying there some hours, until the next tide comes up to help him. Those who navigate Breydon beyond its main channels never do so but with flat-bottomed punts.

There was a little brown spot, a mere speck apparently of mud, such as might have been heaved up by an oar-thrust, on the farthermost bit of naked flat. It appeared to move, the merest turn of a small head, perhaps, and then it was motionless as a stone.

"Hand us *my* glasses, Jary!"

That mud-like fragment at once resolves itself into a small wading bird, and on my shouting and clapping my hands it lifts its head, looks round wonderingly, and finding nothing very threatening near at hand, tucks its bill under its grey wing-coverts and drops off, in an instant, into soundest sleep once more.

The curious way in which the keenest ornithologist may often be deceived by birds remaining perfectly still is a matter for remark. So curiously do birds, standing or sitting perfectly motionless, deceive the eye and the mind together, that the gunner is sometimes entirely off his guard, and his would-be victims profit by it, making good their escape. I have a vivid recollection of a number of ringed plovers watching my movements when on the look-out for innocent objects for slaughter. They remained as quiescent as the stones they had been running amongst, and their black vests only catching my eye, caused me to believe that what I saw was but a scattering of empty mussel-shells. On walking up to get a nearer look, each supposed empty bivalve started into being, and flew away in safety before I could recover from my surprise. The most curious thing is that the gunner almost invariably starts to make examination without preparing for the surprise awaiting him. One moonlight night I rowed up to within a few yards of a large but scattered flock of curlews. I knew there were curlews about, but so quiet and immovable did they remain that I argued within myself as to whether or not they were stranded lumps of broken baskets and seaweed; and just as it dawned upon me that they might be curlews, with a startling clamour—such as only frightened curlews can make—every one of them took to wing and vanished into the night.

My friend Dye some years ago, when he could see, on a bright spring day observed three objects which he thought to be half-bricks dropped in the mud. He passed on, and then curiosity tempted him to get a nearer view. Still half-

doubtful, he fired at them, when one of the red objects altered its position—*spreading its wings* dead on the flat; the other two flew away! They were a trio of beautiful "red" knots, in full nuptial attire. The same illusion occurred in the case of a kingfisher, that kept watchfully quiet on his coming. He saw a streak of palest green among the hawthorn leaves reflecting themselves in a ditch, and thought for the moment how odd it was that a bit of ribbon should have blown there. Instinctively or not, the kingfisher profited by this colour protection, for with a startled scream it took to flight, and was lost at once among the branches of the old hawthorns. The heron standing motionless in stiff angular attitudes, with his plumes and apron fluttering in the breeze, I have often imagined at first sight to be but a ragged basket fringed with debris of *Zostera* or seaweed.

Breydon was not silent: there was a perfect melody of bird notes. The wigeon out on the right tugging at the *Zostera* called "*Sme-ou! sme-ou!*" in a note not unpleasing to the ear. I dare say that note, unvarying as it is to the human ear, meant more than a mutual reminder to make the most of the time before all the water had poured off the flats. The black-headed gulls noisily "*Yah'd!*" to each other as they played around the edge of the channel, up and down which, at sun-up, they started their breakfast patrol. They are now busily engaged in prying into the "lows," or shallow pools, left on the mud. They know that at times there is quite a menagerie encaged there; many a goby, and *Gammarus* and other crustacean, sometimes shrimps and ditch prawns, and juvenile shore crab. Nothing that can be swallowed comes amiss, and if some stranded bread, sodden and crumbling, be left among the rubbish at the edge of the flat, it is equally welcomed and as promptly disposed of.

Half a dozen of these "black-heads," hardly correctly named, for the hood assumed in spring is a warm dark brown —"mouse coloured" you might term it—have just settled on the flat, within a few yards of the houseboat. They are evidently in search of *Nereids*, those queer, red mudworms that lie hidden near the surface, and afford a never-failing supply to the thousands of small waders that call in spring to investigate their habits and habitations. I have known a smart shower to lay bare these worms by thousands, to the

great joy of dunlins and ringed plovers, which, in spite of the downfall, hurry to and fro, most diligently snapping them up. These worms must be wonderfully easy of digestion, for except during the short intervals for sleep, mostly taken at low water, and their pauses for a bath and a brush-down afterwards, these sandpipers seem to be ever hungry, and often feeding. A great wonder to me is how the supplies of worms are kept up! What tons must have been devoured only since I first knew Breydon!

The black-headed gull in winter is a smart little fellow, with his white head and distinctive ear-spots, which look inky-black by comparison, and his sealing-wax-red mandibles and feet. Of course, you know him to be adult if his tail be spotlessly white throughout, and a youngster if it be barred with black across the end of it. Before spring comes the foundations of his hood, so to speak, "run," and, working upwards, meet overhead. Over the eyes, too, a dark band appears, and then, almost imperceptibly, the brown patches blend into each other, the last angular bit of white to give way being seen just above the base of the mandibles. On Boxing Day, 1890, I saw one wholly hooded, and observed another amongst a flock of variously speckle-headed birds, also hooded, on December 29th, 1906.

In March the black-headed gulls leave Breydon for their nesting quarters. Many visit Scoulton, and nest there on a sedgy island in some numbers; but all through the spring small parties return almost daily to feed and frolic on their favourite mudflats.

Turning our glasses on to the wigeon feeding by the Duffell's flat, we become much interested in the adroit manner in which they dip, in turn, to get at the succulent stems of the "grass." The upper portion dangles but a few moments from their mandibles, and is separated, to float upon the surface, until quite a swath of it lies there, to be carried downstream after the next good tide. It is possible to judge whether mallard and duck have been feeding with the wigeon, either by day or night. Wigeon cut off the "grass" from below, and mostly devour only the lower portion—the stem; the others bite the fronds, devouring fragments a little over an inch in length. You can see small bits floating about. Wigeon will sometimes, when hungry,

swallow stem and frond. They will eagerly eat, too, the dry, chaffy remnants of *Salicornia herbacea*—the jointed glasswort. In dissecting a duck last January (1907) I found the crop full of pieces of it, reminding one forcibly of the "sticks" that sometimes float on the surface of one's tea.

The flocks that collect here in springtime are often very numerous, varying in numbers almost daily, as contingents come and go, or alternate their nightly feeds with a siesta by day at sea, when quiet is assured. On Breydon the wigeon delights to feed and make love, and petty quarrels sometimes take place among the drakes. They seem curiously human in some of the phases of their life!

The drakes appear to me to be always in excess of the ducks. Sometimes a flock of two thousand birds may be seen fussing about at one time; such an assembly makes the quiet night weird by the *sme-ou* (with the *ou* prolonged a trifle at times, like the plaint of a dove) of the gallant drakes, and the queer little snappy responses of their females; then the bibbling of their bills and the scrunching of the "grass" are distinctly heard across the water. In 1905 I saw three male wigeon on Breydon as late as May 13th.

These birds afforded the old gunners much sport in the days before close seasons stayed their hand. Even in the early days of protection, there were still big bags made now and then, and the slaughtered birds were smuggled home by ways so devious and cunning, that the perpetrators would have puzzled a preventive man—as their early forbears did the customs officers, when they hid their contraband in the then thickly reeded, but now barren lows and obliterated pulk-holes, in a corner near which the *Moorhen* lies in peaceful seclusion. But this no longer obtains, for our friend inside, now calling me to breakfast, is attentive to his duties. So the wigeon have a right royal time of it; and amongst them, in complete security and in perfect amity, scarcer and even rarer fowl are to be found feeding and fraternising, such as pintail ducks, shovelers, teal, and others, not to mention the mallard and his sober-hued spouse.

Some years ago, when there was no law against it, and consequently no real sinning (?), "Fiddler" Goodens was paddling around after the wigeon, when he saw a couple of weary avocets thigh-deep in the water, and probably floating.

He fired his big gun at them, killing one; and the other, after hovering round its dead companion for some moments, flew away towards a parcel of wigeon swimming in George's "deek," near which it settled. At that period avocets had not such a high price placed upon their heads as they now have, and wigeon were more saleable. Goodens, thinking it would be safe to let the avocet alone a bit, owing to its tameness, decided to have first shot at the ducks; but while he was deciding upon a method of procedure, and ere he had "laid" his gun, up they flew, the avocet joining them, and went right away to the north-east, it is hoped to less inhospitable shores.

"*Breakfast!*" shouted Jary.

* * * * * *

April is generally a pleasant month on Breydon, for the days are lengthening, and milder weather as a rule obtains; but there comes occasionally the piercing north-easter, from over the bleak North Sea, chilling and depressing. One year, as late as May 11th, I was tarring the hull of the *Moorhen* in the midst of a blinding snowstorm.

April is a month of no small interest to the naturalist, for many migratory birds are changing their quarters, making this eastern corner of the country a sort of half-way house; and their appearance is too regular to surprise us. Some birds may be looked for almost to a day, although their presence and their numbers may be regulated by winds and weather. It seems to me that migratorial birds generally like to travel with a side wind; a few are seen coming at times dead against it, and if it is likely to be shortly coming forcefully behind them, they will come on well ahead of it. This occurs both in spring and autumn, so far as my observation goes. The swallows, the black terns, the swifts, and the godwits, with several others, might make use of an avine time-table!

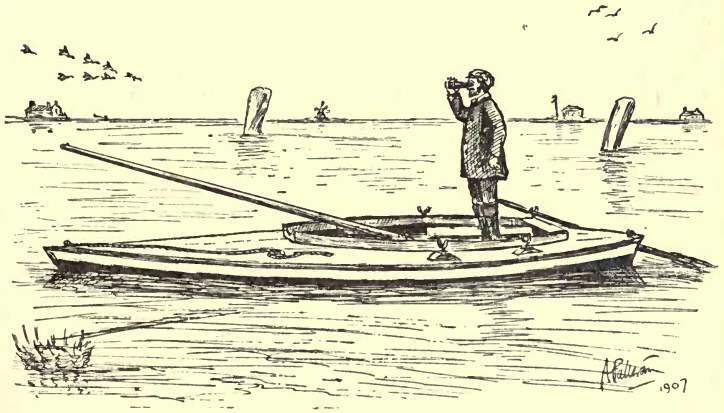
* * * * * *

OUT BIRD WATCHING

A fine bracing morning tempts us to push off in the punt, on the rising tide, for an hour or two of loitering among the

mudflats; and, helped by a steady breeze from the south-east —the most favourable of all for seeing the spring migrants on the move—away we go, bowling along right merrily.

Our punt is a double-ended boat, decked on the "fore-peak," a rail runs round the "well" in which we sit to row, and there is a short decked-in portion astern. On either side are lockers for sundry naturalistic stores—cord, wadding, specimen tins, with a bottle of formalin, and a shelf for the binoculars handy, for one never knows what he may meet with. Eighteen feet over all, with a beam of nearly four feet at its widest, the flat-bottomed punt is just the vessel for



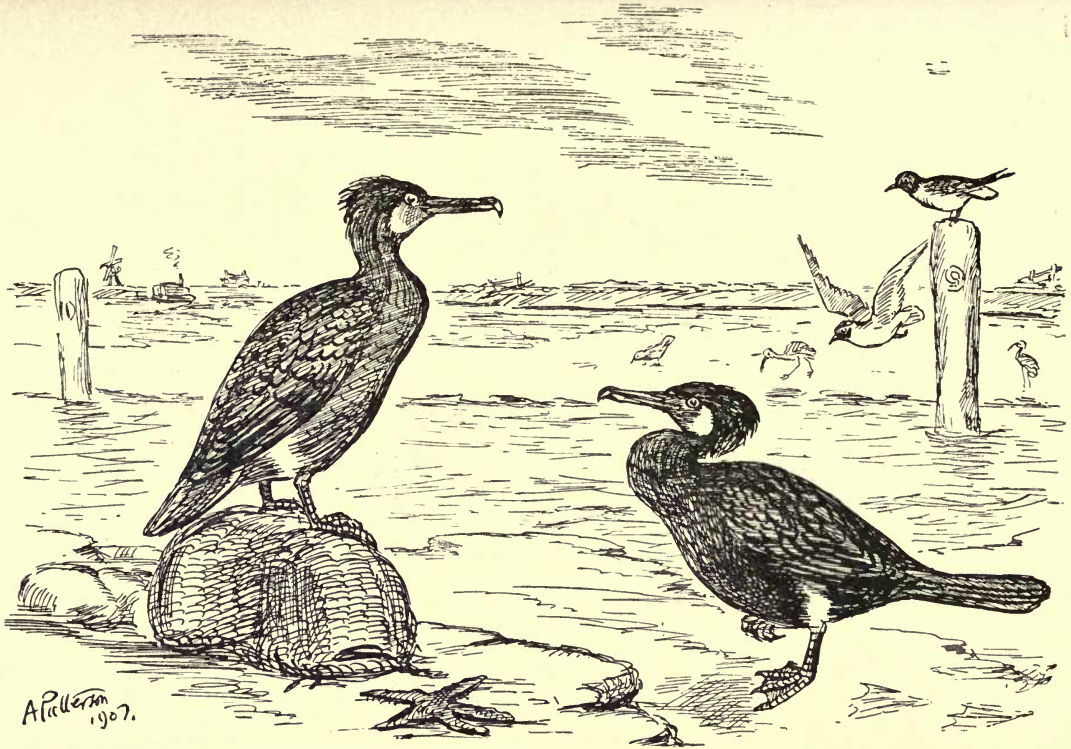
A BREYDON GUN-PUNT

exploring creek, flat, and salting. The rower sits on a box seat, and whoever adds himself to the crew sits on a low seat astern. When the small tanned sail goes up the stump of a mast the skipper sits aft, holding sheet and tiller, and the additional "hand" must sit squat on a cushion on the floor, with his back to the mast. Alone, the skipper crowds on all sail, and flies along with mast at half a right angle, to the great wonderment of the gaping saddle-backed gulls, wakened from their doze by the side of the channel, and putting up the gaunt herons that are abstractedly fishing at the entrances of the creeks, or "runs," that here and there branch from the main "drain," to lose themselves among the flats. The

herons away yonder fishing low in the creeks, only show their long, lank necks above the level of the flat, looking as odd as do isolated stalks of buttonless sprouts when one hurries past a garden. They seem to know the old *Fiddle-case.*[1] A Breydon punt spells speed, scant elbow-room, squatness, and easy management; one can bowl along with the tiller and sheet in one hand, and focus his beloved Zeiss's in the other. One comes, too, to see and not to be seen! I may as well say here that the *Fiddle-case* was built to suit a naturalist, and not for sporting; consequently, although more roomy, it is not built on the graceful lines of those beautiful models used by artistic-minded sportsmen. My friend Mr. Albert Beckett, together with the late Fielding Harmer, one of the bygone race of gentlemen punt-gunners, have brought the lines of this boat to perfection, and compared with it, punts I have seen at Lynn and Aldeburgh are the merest "wash-keelers."

Now my visitor has settled himself, and the captain is at the tiller, for the *Fiddle-case* differs from all other punts in possessing a rudder, the rest being guided by a sculling-oar thrust through a fixed rowlock placed far astern. Let us be off. We are not many minutes in reaching the huge railway bridge that spans the entrance of Breydon, and which causes wherrymen and yachting folk to sin more with their tongues than does any other obstacle in their tracks. Passing under it, with plenty of room to spare, we are almost at once abreast of the North Wall drain. Stake No. 1 adjoins it. The drain makes a detour for nearly a mile, running parallel to the walls, and for a long way with the railway metals beside it. Sometimes the flats hereabouts are tenanted by a host of small waders, which after a while pay little heed to the noisy locomotives gliding along beside the wall. Wildfowl do not stay long enough to get over their fright of them, and the anathemas of the ancient race of punters who fished and shot here in the 40's were long and deep. I heard the echoes of them in the 70's and 80's, when the old fellows, in a reminiscent mood, warmed up and waxed eloquent. There was fairly deep water, and fresh, at the neap tides, and there were reed-beds down as far as the signal-box—*in the long*

[1] The name given to my punt by some of the Breydoners when first launched on Breydon.



UNCOMFORTABLE QUARTERS. CORMORANTS ON BREYDON

ago; "and there WERE wildfowl, too," they told me. But we must describe Breydon as it is to-day.

I was astonished beyond measure one spring—it may be four years ago—to see a spoonbill restfully feeding here, almost within gunshot of the bridge-builders hammering and toiling with sledge and bellows; it paid no more heed to the clangour than if it were a puff of wind rustling the sedges beside a desert pool. I saw an Iceland gull, innocent evidently, and trustful of men's ways, pottering about on the flat yonder under the wall; I crawled along the wall to within a few yards of it, and feasted my eyes on the interesting stranger, creamy of plumage, and tired after rough winds. An hour later the gun of a Breydoner, who was not sentimental, had slain it.

You notice that Breydon is "staked," i.e. at intervals of a few hundred yards a trimmed-up tree-trunk, an oak for choice, has been driven into the mud to mark the channel. This leafless avenue extends quite to Burgh and Berney Arms. On the left, going up, the stakes are painted red; on the right they are glistening black with tar. Each one is numbered; the last one being Number 56. No boat without a keel should ever dare to get outside this course, for the flats come wellnigh out to them; and he who, not knowing the risk of it, ventures there, may have to pay for his audacity or his ignorance by sticking on the mud. A yachtsman may ground there, as I have seen him, on the top of the last of the spring tides which, "falling off" directly after, may leave him prisoner for days, unless he pays the native "pirates" to dig him out. The main channel is over four fathoms deep in places.

The punter runs few risks, for three or four inches of water will suffice to float him, and if he goes aground a sturdy shove with the oar or his little "quant" will back him speedily into sufficiently deep water again. To the experienced eye the extremely sinuous drains that intersect the flats are easily followed, even when the big flood tide covers everywhere: the colour of the water—usually greenest where deepest—the peculiar ruffling made over deep water by the faintest breeze, and other signs are as readable as a chart to him. I myself have, in a dense fog and in darkest night, piloted my punt across to and from the *Moorhen*, simply by feeling my way with the oars. But this is not easy on a

windy night, for twisting currents may soon cause one to lose one's bearings.

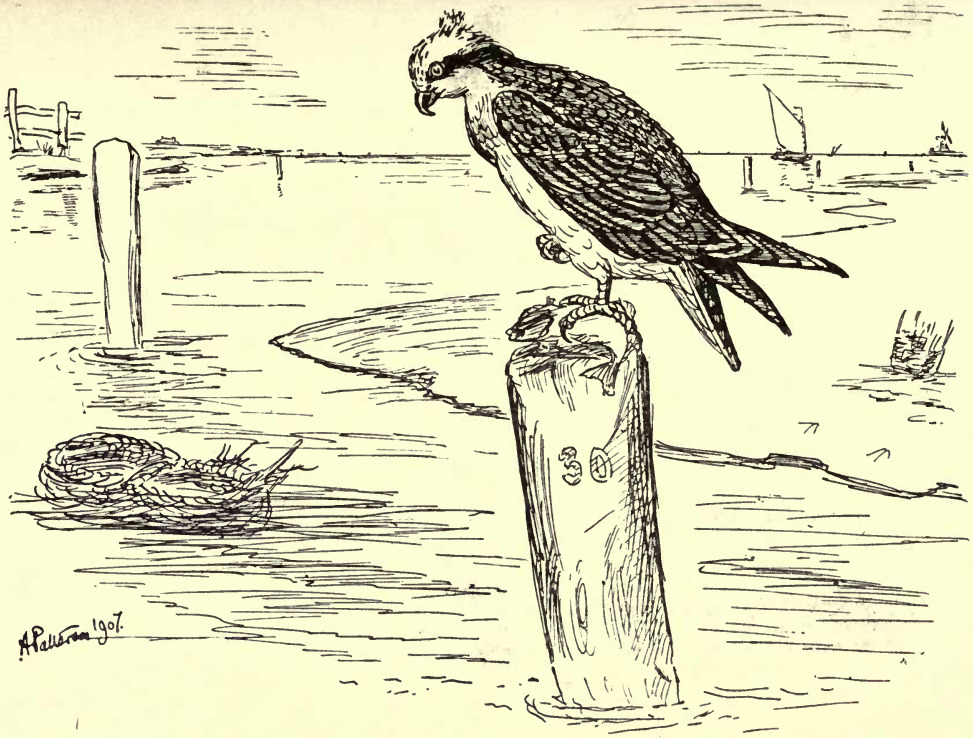
The Five-stake drain starts from the main channel against stake Number 3. We noticed five rugged stumps, which marked the entrance to this drain until recently; these gnarled timbers have stood there since I first knew Breydon. To-day they have no significance beyond naming the drain which now runs out south of them, the bridge buttresses having somewhat altered the set of the tides. Now and again an ambitious gull perches atop one: in the 50's and 60's, on these and many of the Breydon stakes, cormorants used frequently to perch, with their wings half-open and ungracefully hung out to dry, after a feast of herrings and flounders. I have seen odd ones doing so in the 80's.

That valiant Britisher the osprey, or fishing hawk, was no stranger on Breydon in the olden days; but every man's hand was then, as it is now, against it, and I fear that this bird, which by its appearance would add a charm to this wilderness, will never visit us again. Just imagine what a delightful picture an osprey would make perched on yonder stake, with a cormorant on the next one, a half-dozen spoonbills on the flat behind, and a score beautiful herons, as we often see them now, working the drains on the right! Let me sketch a picture. . . .

"Johnny" Thomas was loafing around in his old grey punt, with his half-fingerless hands clothed in woollen, fingerless gloves, and his short legs encased in huge water-boots that swallowed half his length.

"Gawd bliss my sowl and body!" (his favourite invocation) said Thomas, "I hain't had a shot this mornin'!" but just as he neared the Five-stake drain, a magnificent osprey was observed restlessly flitting from post to post in the intervals of a search for its breakfast. For some time Thomas hoped and tried in vain to get a shot at it.

"All right, Johnny," said "Fiddler" Goodens, who was hovering in the vicinity, "I'll sune have him on a stake," and he at once began pitching out some of the liveliest roach and bream he had in the boat with him. Goodens had been, early that morning, a mile or so up the Bure with a net after fresh-water fishes, which he was then taking up Breydon to use as bait in his eel-pots.



THE OSPREY

"They'll sune come up to the top in salt water!" added Goodens, which remark proved to be correct, for they rose to the surface, suffocating and feebly struggling in an element to which they were unaccustomed. The osprey promptly dashed down, seized one of the largest of the fish with its talons, and repaired to an adjacent stake to devour it. This was "Johnny's" opportunity, and carefully squatting in the well of the boat, and sculling with one hand, while he kept the other on the trigger of his punt-gun, he soon succeeded in killing the bird.

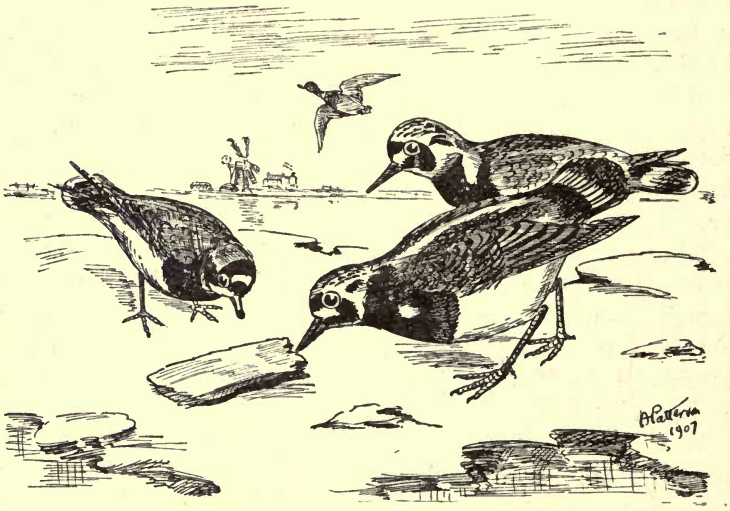
The only interesting feature of the incident was the instinctive shrewdness of old Goodens. It shows the ready wit of those whose training has been amid the wild life of the local waterways.

A hundred yards or so up this drain, on the right, are the well-known "Lumps"; they are the highest portions of the flats, and were, no doubt, many years ago part of a big rond or salting. To-day a "lump" here and there is grassed over by coarse marsh herbage, made greener in places by patches of sea scurvy-grass; and in summer the bare levels around them are carpeted by wide stretches of the so-called samphire—the jointed glass-wort (*Salicornia herbacea*). The old folks used to pickle it and eat it; latterly no one has troubled himself about it, for the grocer saves much labour and provides more appetising sauces.

It is here that some of the gunners, especially those amateurs who carry only shoulder-guns, gather in their various vessels at the last of the flood tide; whither, also, when everywhere else is flooded, the poor, harassed wading birds come to feed or rest, hoping, no doubt, that the waters will not rise sufficiently high to wash them off. Imitating their various call-notes, often very badly, the gunners sometimes decoy the restless flocks and decimate their numbers. A flock of knots, lessening at each round, will keep answering the fatal call, or dash in as if to tempt their fallen fellows to rejoin them, only to be smitten and to float dead beside them, until not a single one may be left to tell the tale of slaughter. Young birds suffer most at such times. But we are here with no evil designs; and in April they are safe from molestation. The more that come hither the merrier they may be. We have come to watch their

ways and doings, and our trusty binoculars will assist us to that end.

Look you! There are some turnstones—five of them—flinging over with petulant haste the stranded tangle, and bits of stick and refuse left by the tide. They are hunting for crustaceans, hidden there to feed and to escape the light and air. The shorehopper, first cousin to the sandhopper, is their favourite quest. Whatever cunning they may possess, the faculty of imitation is not a feature with the shore-birds; you never hear them utter a note but their forbears used it, and their ways and movements are unchangeable. No other



EXPECTATION. TURNSTONES AND RINGED PLOVER

bird apes the manners of the turnstone. They may earnestly watch him turning over the drift weed as the farmer's man turns hay, and know with what results; yet they never "turnstone" for themselves; they wait on him, however, and profit by his labours. The dunlin and the ringed plover will rob him or share in the proceeds. I have seen the turnstone lose his temper after successive robberies, and fly away to be rid of his tormentors.

Watching the birds has become so interesting that we have hurriedly lowered the sail, and run the boat's nose into the mud to anchor awhile and see more of their doings. One cannot lie too closely or conceal himself too carefully.

Throw this sack over your shoulders and lie down on the punt floor.

Some whimbrel, advance guard of the swarm that come here to court and pair off in May, have been watching our manœuvres; but becoming reassured, begin to feed again on the far edge of the flat, and soon after to hunt on the drier part of it. The whimbrel likes to pick about with dry legs, and no doubt falls in with much that the more moisture-loving species miss. I have seen these "Lumps" quite lively with spiders—I should say *Sycosidæ*; few birds will pass them without sampling them. And then there are thousands of *Hydrobia ulvæ*, those winkle-like molluscs which swarm in the finer months on every "grass" blade, on either side when floating vertically, and beneath when prostrate on the ebb. Winkles, too, are plentiful, as are the most juvenile of shore-crabs. The whimbrel's gullet is not a large one, but these can all easily be swallowed; and I have a very strong suspicion that, failing to digest these shells of *Littorina*, the whimbrel and many other waders vomit them as owls do fur. I would like to know whence, but for such "ejectments," come all the empty shells which are eddied together at the "stone" corners, making in time quite miniature crag formations! The whimbrel is a noisy fellow, and one bird "titterells" to another, so they pass on the watchword, or their compliments, right away to those feeding a mile away. See! some curlews have joined them, and are beginning to thrust in their long bills, right to the hilt at times, in their searchings for small clams (*Mya arenaria*), and the dwarfed cockles that sparsely neighbour with them. The curlew, nervous and suspicious, often amuses me by the way he jumps at the squirting of a startled clam as it draws in its siphon. The larger molluscs throw up quite a respectable jet; and if you keep your eye on the softer mud you will see this process going on repeatedly. You can see, too, even from the boat their holes in the mud, varying in size from pin-pricks to those large enough to insert your finger in. Drive in your hand curlew's bill-length, and you may feel the hard shell of the clam reposing edge-ways up. Nothing but a hooded crow would thank you for one of those larger, vile-tasted molluscs.

These crows, by the way, are not all gone; a few, dotted here and there, are still to be seen picking up a precarious

livelihood, depending now on drowned kittens and puppies, small stranded fish thrown out from the shrimp-boats, and any other useless flotsam of the kind.

It is extremely interesting to see how the shore-birds frolic and feed and fraternise. They live in a little world quite of their own; they have their joys and surprises, their worries and fancies, and there is earnest as well as frolicsomeness in their daily round. They appear to have no regularly set times for slumber, and are awakened from soundest sleep by the least of alarms. Nor do they all sleep at one time, for odd birds are sure to be on the watch against surprise: these may be preening their feathers, or standing listlessly as if thinking, but their beady eyes are keen to discern the slightest threat of danger. When feeding in flocks of any number, dunlins, curlew-sandpipers, and others of their kindred seem far more shy and mistrustful, more especially if there be any ringed plovers among them. It may be that, trusting to scouts and sentinels, danger is the more quickly recognised and the more promptly evaded, whereas solitary birds and small family parties are less suspicious, and will often allow of a very near approach. I have drifted past solitary little waders which I could almost have reached with an oar, and have deliberately splashed water over them ere they would take to wing. Small waders are more restless on the flood tide than on the ebb; and gunners know that their chances to get a shot into the "brown" of a flock are greater when, after being disturbed from their feeding grounds by the rising waters, they bunch up and wheel round and round like a compact squadron of cavalry, to find fresh quarters. Then it is that a clever mimicry of their call-notes may mean disaster to them; for, evidently imagining some fortunate companion has something to tell them, the poor things dash by in search of him, and the slaughter of a number of them assures the survivors, sometimes with broken legs and often much-ruffled feathers, how badly they have been deceived.

When the tide falls, leaving a sloppy surface on the ooze, and before the *Annelidæ* and other low forms of life have drawn back far into the mud, or hidden, for the moisture that is necessary to life and comfort—then are the smaller tribes of shore-birds happiest and busiest; and they will scatter in all directions with eagerness, covering with astonishing alacrity

a great area of ground, as if well aware that it is a case of urgency if they would have their fill.

Time is flying. We had better go back to the channel, hoist the sail again, and make for stake No. 6, rounding which we enter the Ship drain. A magnificent old heron stands asleep at the corner of the flat, but promptly awakes and uplifts his head as the *sciss* of the boat's prow cutting the water falls on his keen ear. The long and elegant black crest on his nearly white head waves in the wind like a warship's pennant. With a loud, frightened *Hank!* he takes to lumbering flight, sailing away to join a companion farther up the drain. On the flat here to the left, as recently as April 12th, 1902, I saw thirty hooded crows, some of them by their actions already paired off, gathered, and making up their minds to cross the sea; it was odd to see them and some swallows in close proximity.

A mixed flock of dunlins are feeding at the edge of the flat. Some are horse-shoed on the breast with black—old birds, of course—a few are still almost as grey as in winter; they are immature, and probably young birds now completing the first year. An oyster-catcher flits by, erratic and hurried in flight, yelping noisily. Strange it is that this species, which musters up so numerously at the north-west of the county, is but the merest straggler to Breydon, nor does he often visit the foreshore. Maybe, if we had mussel-scalps, he might come oftener. There is nothing rare about to-day—the spoonbill occasionally drops in in April, and the avocet still more rarely. Now and then a few godwits, far ahead of their relatives, visit us as early as the middle of the month; ringed plovers are often abundant, and in fairly numerous flocks may be seen winging their way about all over the place; while redshanks come daily to feed from their nesting quarters on the adjacent marshes.

The tide has risen high enough to allow of a straight course over the flats; so we leave the sinuous drain and George's "deek" on our right, with the houseboats at the "corner," and point the bow of the punt straight for the *Moorhen*. It is about time that we had dinner. Below us waves the *Zostera*, crowded with *Hydrobia* that scratch the bottom of the punt with a queer rasping noise as we bowl along over them. Here and there, in a patch bare of "grass,"

we see the smoky curl of the silt forced up by the dashing swim of a large flounder—the "smoke" curls behind it like that from a freshly coaled steam-engine; and great shore-crabs, with threatening pincer-claws, scuttle into the labyrinths of the next bunch of *Zostera*. A few gulls and rooks pass to and fro overhead on their respective ways, and a small skein of geese high up aloft are seen passing northwards. Some lapwings are calling on the marshes, and a greenshank with clamorous "*Pleu! pleu! pleu!*" takes to hurried flight towards a "low" in the rond, as by a smart turn of the helm, and a quick gybing of the sail, we bring the punt up broadside to the little staging fronting the salting on which the *Moorhen* sits perched, high and dry; and the good-tempered old retriever from the marsh farm comes hurrying up to greet us, and to beg for anything we can spare from the table.

The next thing "on the board" is to chop some firewood from the heap in the basket hanging there on the rail, and to light a fire in the cabin. While I am doing the household work, you may be looking through this ancient telescope. There may be a few wigeon floating "upward," and you will get a good view of the surrounding lowlands—Burgh on the right, Mautby, Runham, and Stokesby out there to the north'ard. You think, then, that my Breydon observatory is pitched in a most interesting situation? I quite agree with you.

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You like the *Moorhen!* Well, most of my friends say they do who have honoured me with their company. I suppose it is the strangeness of the situation—its "uniqueness," as one gentleman termed it. One gets away from all the turmoil of the restless town, its excitements, worries, dirt, and artificialities. You here, somehow, get back to Nature, even in the matter of feeding! In summer my eel-pick, my butt-dart, and the watcher's net bring from the depths and shallows tenants for my pan and pot. Sweet, home-made bread, and eggs and milk and cheese from neighbour Banham's farm hard by, are famous for satisfying the equally famous appetite one acquires out here. The most fastidious visitor may bring in the punt's lockers more dainty and perhaps less wholesome viands from the town. The

skipper of the *Moorhen* once in a while brings hither a sack of coals; but firewood may be had for the finding among the drift on the walls. In these lockers, you see, I have all sorts of household utensils, from a kettle to a tin-opener. You are now cushioning yourself on one of my horsehair mattresses. Narrow, you say? Well, at night we up with a bed-board on either settle, and having rolled ourselves in our blankets, are as snug as in a liner's bunks. One can't nicely roll out over a seven-inch rail! Can I sleep well? Ask Banham, the marshman, who comes across wondering, long after sunrise, why I am not yet up, and wakes me with a sturdy cowstick, knocking vigorously upon the cabin side.

The *Moorhen* is typical of the many "Noah's Arks" used by smelters, eel-fishers, and others who spend days and nights on Norfolk waters. The hull, originally an old smack's boat, has been cabined over, a stove erected and stowage cupboards and settles added to suit the caprices or needs of the owner. In her palmier days the *Moorhen* drifted up and down the river and on to the Broads; but with age a boat gets leaky, and her skipper less restless. *And Breydon grows on one so!*

And here must the *Moorhen* end her days, on Banham's rond, her shadow cast over the sea scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*) in springtime, the Michaelmas daisy (*Aster tripolium*) making a garden around her in the autumn, while on summer days the scent of the wild southernwood (*Artemisia maritima*) that clothes the walls in big grey patches, is not ungrateful. One can always depend on the cabin, save in the winter months, being dry and habitable; in winter the now rather fragile skipper wisely sleeps at home!

You like the *Moorhen!* I am glad you do, for I like to hear my old tried friends well spoken of.

* * * * * *

A NATIVE'S OPINIONS

Dinner ended and the houseboat locked up, we may as well get over Breydon to Jary's houseboat, which you can see lying at the entrance to Duffell's drain. I have stowed the sail and mast, and put the oars inside too: I will quant her thither. If the tide were falling I should make for the

cross drain, which from the end of the rond takes a most sinuous course to Duffell's drain; but there is still plenty of water under us. My quant is somewhat like a boat-hook, minus the iron shodding, to which at half a right angle a wooden toe is fastened to prevent its sinking in the mud at every thrust. Poor old "Pero" Pestell constructed this for my especial use. We will stop a little while with Jary, and gossip till the tide falls.

* * * * * *

We had scarcely fastened the punt to Jary's houseboat and stepped aboard ere an open boat, manned by "Snicker" Larn, his comrade "Short 'un" Page, and another old fellow, came up, and hitched on their painter to the houseboat's "ringle." They were up after smelts; before the tide eases they will have left us, and gone right up the Duffell's drain to shoot their net, which they do the moment there is ebb tide sufficient to move it along downstream. For the present they are ready to load their pipes and have a friendly "draw," and are as ready as ever to discuss old Breydon and the days of yore, not forgetting to wedge in many a grumble about the day we live in.

"Look 'ere," said "Snicker," "things is rotten nowadays—Breydon'll never see the likes again."

"You think not?" I queried.

"'Bor, I know it!" he answered dogmatically. "Look how Breydon's grow'd up," he said. "Why, the tide's no suner on the flats than it's off; why, theer useter be enuf water at ornery tides to sail about anywheer at low water—it's the silth and filt what done it."

"The what?"

"The silth and filt—the mud from up river and the refuge from the town—it get in that old grass [*Zostera*] and settle theer every tide—can't get away. There's ten times more on it than there wor sixty year ago."

"Now look here," I said, "when you place an obstruction out in a tideway it makes a corresponding eddy——"

"Yes," he nodded.

"Well, when they built the Dickey Works—a sort of close-boarded jetty, up there near Berney Arms, and drove the water from the two rivers meeting there into one common

channel, it had the effect of *deepening* that channel, and the eddy pulled the silt round with it——"

"Well——"

"Well," I said, "instead of the two rivers spreading all over the flats and keeping them down to an ordinary level, they lost this scour and gained the silt."

"I see what you're driving at," said he, "but why don't fish cum up here as they useter? Wheer's the butts [flounders] and mullet, and such like?"

"We must go to the harbour for that," I answered, "for since the *north* pier has been pushed out far beyond the *south* pier (it used to be the other way about) the flood tide has been 'set off,' taking the fish past the harbour, to the benefit of those who fish in the Ham beyond, at Gorleston. The tide races out with greater force, too, on the ebb, and deepens the river at the bar. These things benefit those who do business in ships, and we now get vessels in drawing far more water than in years gone by. It's good for trade," I added.

"And —— bad for Breydoners!" said he bitterly.

"Well, Larn," I said soothingly, "nowadays it must be the greatest good for the greatest number——"

"But it's —— hard on us Breydoners!" he repeated with emphasis. "*Some has to suffer.*"

"Yes," I said, "it's vexing, though it can't be helped. You've seen a thing or two here in your time?" I added, turning the subject,

"Ah, 'bor, I hev," said he.

"Birds?" I queried.

"Well, I nivver done much in birds. Fish hev bin more in my line. Of course, I've seen lots of swans, and geese, and all that, and seen enuf of 'em shot. I've picked up French partridges up here in foggy weather, and seen an old hare messed up tryin' to cross the flats."

"I've took a rum fish or two up here," jibed in "Short 'un" Page. "The clinkingest cod I ever saw I got in a net jist in the entrance of the Norridge river; and I once nabbed a turbot fourteen pound weight, and made fourteen shillin's on it. Lor', I ha' got great herrin's, so I hev gurnets and dog-fish. Why, even old gants [gannets] useter come on here arter yawlers; many a time I've seen 'em pitch in and get 'em. Yawlers is half-grow'd herrin's, you know."

"Grey mullet?" he continued; "why, I've 'erd old Calver once took a boatload on 'em, and made £8. 15s. with the catch up in Billin'sgate.[1] You put that down in your book afore, you know."

"My best catch of them old mullet," interposed "Snicker," "was in the bight agin the Dickey Works——"

"That's the place," edged in "Short 'un."

"Shut up, 'on't you?" said "Snicker," turning on "Short 'un." "My catch brought in about £13, which was about half what it would ha' brought in nowadays. We orter copt more, only so many on 'em popped over the net back into Breydon."

"I've had 'em jump over my hid!" said "Short 'un," laughing.

"*Your* heed!" snapped "Snicker," "why, you ain't more 'an three feet nothin' in your water butes,[2] though you've got as fat a heed as annyboddy. I'll allow they *can* jump though, and more 'an once I've know'd the lot to go over like a flock of sheep, and left nothin' in the net. Nine pounds was the heaviest mullet as I ever took."

"Nine——"

"Shut up, 'on't yer? Nine stone I suppose *you've* copt 'em, though I once got a sturgeon over eleven stone.[3] I've got a skate as nearly pulled me overboard, and nice plaice useter come up now and agin. I once helped to land a twenty-six pound conger what got in a smelt-net."

"Nice job?" I queried.

"I should think so. My own mother wouldn't ha' known me for mud and filt when we'd settled his hash for him."

"You've known some queer chaps up here?" I asked.

"*Hev* I?" he answered. "Why, yes. I hain't been up here nigh sixty year without. There was old Bessy, 'Gabey' Thomas——"

"You knew old 'Bugles'?"

"*Knew* him! Why, yes! He was the superstitiousest old fule I ever know'd. Johnny Bloom, he was, and took more barrels of beer down on him than I've ever smelt, though we might let the dade rest. He couldn't abear frogs! He'd

[1] Vide *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, pp. 284–5.
[2] "Short 'un" Page stands about four feet in height.
[3] Vide *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, p. 248.

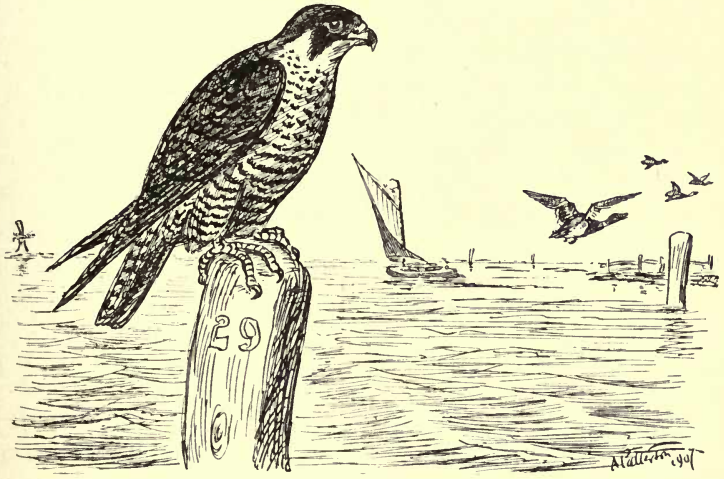
walk a mile rather 'an meet one, and when he useter go a-pickin' of a nite in the deeks [ditches], he'd always hold his eel-pick over his hid to see as he hadn't got a frog on, and lost many a good eel through it. If he upset a bucket of eels on the mesh [marsh], he dussent for the life on him pick 'em up for fear of touchin' his finger agin a frog!"

"That's quite right!" put in "Short 'un."

Without deigning to notice this interruption, Larn went on.

"You remember old 'Silky' Watson?" he asked.

"I just remember him," said I.



PEREGRINE FALCON

"Well, he was the snuggest man at a big gun I ever seed; *and couldn't he swear!* One day—it was a terrible hard winter, and Breydon was friz all over, with only a 'wake' here and there in the channels. 'Silky' had spotted a parcel of ducks sittin' on the ice at the edge; they were perched up three feet from the water. Old 'Silky' laid low and began to scull up to 'em, when all on a sudden, up went their hids, and in hid fust the next minnet they dove. On turnin' round Watson seed a big hawk [peregrine] dash past him, but, like him, the hawk had lost 'em——"

"You say he *swore!*" I remarked.

"*Well!* he'd bin a old man-o'-war's man, *and you could hear him all over Breydon!*" replied "Snicker" impressively. "But,

Lor', times *is* altered. Look here" (he said solemnly), "with all them steam drifters goin' in and out the harbour all the fish is drove away. My biggest haul of eels? Well, some years ago I made a drag-net—that wor a bit of smelt-net, with a poke to it. Me and another went up to the Fleet deek, near Dan Banham's, knowin' the hot summer had dried up the deeks to a few swales [isolated pools or puddles]. This was thirty year ago. We was refused leave by one owner, whose old sow was eatin' eels till she pritty nigh busted; so we went fudder on, without axin' leave on the next property. Haulin' the net, one each side of the deek, we filled two bushel skeps with 'em; they couldn't help themselves as they ruted about in the swales till the slub was all on a work. That year, afore the rain came, suffin like two hundred stone of dade eels was found in the deeks. Have I had any bad luck? Why, don't you remember me tellin' you last November me and 'Short 'un' and 'him' took twenty-nine smelts for two whole days' work?"[1]

"*Look, come here!*" interjected Jary. We all looked, and a pretty sight rewarded us: eleven dainty black terns were rising and dipping as they came along the Duffell's drain. Nothing more swallow-like in general appearance and in their manners could be imagined as they came tripping along, now snatching at some insect or other on the surface of the water—they could not be *fishes!*—and now swinging around and overhead without seeming effort. We watched them going away to the north-eastward, mounting up higher as they neared the walls—a parcel of little black fairies.

"They'll be on Hickling Broad for dinner," said Jary, pulling out his pipe.

"Look 'ere, Pattson," said "Snicker," "this 'on't du: the blessed tide's a-fallin'!"

* * * * * *

AMONG THE MAY BIRDS

May is pre-eminently the month of the birds in eastern Norfolk, for many species are expected which will spend the

[1] This is a fact. On November 14th and 15th, 1906, the sum total was twenty-nine smelts for three men's work. "Snicker" came to me for a loaf, almost broken-hearted. "Snicker" is sixty-seven, "Short 'un" seventy, "him" seventy-four. Poor old fellows! and still toiling at their nets!

sunnier days in our midst, while more are looked for as mere callers, on their way to their northern nesting quarters. Some of the rarest of our British waders drop in to spend a short vacation on the mudflats, and it is now that their plumage is at its best. One May's arrivals will differ greatly from another, a fact for which the direction and force of prevailing winds are greatly responsible. Given a continuation of strong westerly or south-westerly winds, and only the merest stragglers from the migrating armies are to be met with, while with a succession of winds from the east and south-east, the trend of the migratory hordes will favour this side of the German Ocean, and then it is that the naturalist sees much that may interest him.

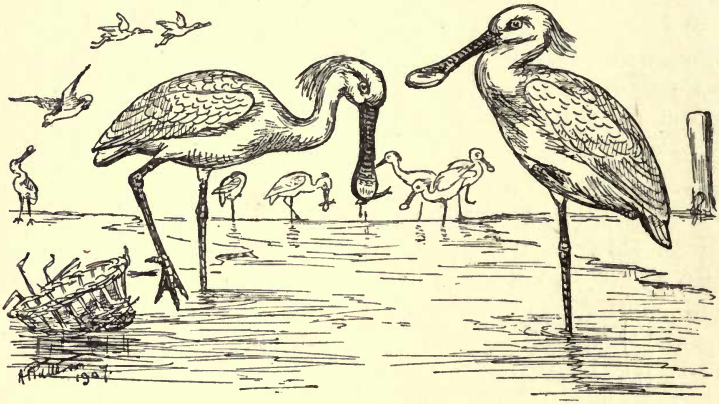
A mere catalogue of the strange and interesting birds to be seen on Breydon, even in these degenerate days, by any one who could spare hours to loiter about in the drains and by the mudflats, would be far from uninteresting; and had there been trustworthy recorders in the old days, besides those who wrote their *obituaries* in blood, we might have possessed some delightful literature. Unfortunately, in the "good old days"(?) to go after birds meant less to watch than to kill; glad am I that to-day the tendency becomes stronger to watch and admire, and the old spirit, too, of watching to outwit and slay, although still strong, grows less manifest. It is to be hoped that future bird-histories will contain fewer and fewer notes of "specimens shot—[with date]—."

It may seem strange that notwithstanding the lament so often heard of birds becoming scarcer, that noble fellow the spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), taking one year with another, has visited us more frequently of late years than formerly. It is an exceptional year that does not see one "banjo-bill" stalking about with easy gracefulness at the edge of some flat, spooning up shrimps and small mollusca; while little surprise is expressed at the sight of six or even a dozen of these birds dropping in to spend a few days with us "specimen hunting." Were the Broadlands made a sanctuary, I feel confident this splendid bird would be induced to come and nest again with us. Occasionally, early in April, oftener in May, and sometimes until well into July, has the spoonbill been recorded for Breydon. The late Fielding Harmer[1]

[1] *Birds shot on Breydon Water*

gives an imperfect list of some forty-five spoonbills observed here between 1854 and 1889; of these more than half occurred in May, and one as early as March 20th;[1] but at least two-thirds of them are simply dated, with the accompanying epitaph—"*Shot on Breydon.*" In spite of close season quite a number are openly marked "Shot." Fortunately for "spooney," he may now venture here in perfect safety. Seventeen of these birds were feeding within half a mile of me at one time on April 28th, 1901.

For what reason the handsome little knot (*Tringa canutus*), in his summer suit of russet red, has forsaken Breydon, I am utterly at a loss to imagine. Year by year its visits have



SPOONBILLS

become less frequent, and one is fortunate to see half a dozen in a spring. Fielding Harmer's remark that it is "abundant both in winter and summer plumage" does not now hold good. It must have been an exceptional year when, as he states, "In 1863, in May, they were abundant in summer plumage. Forty, fifty, and sixty were killed at a shot." It is, as a rule, a tame and unsuspicious little creature, and in autumn it severely suffers for this misplaced confidence.

The avocet, that daintiest of all the waders, now visits us only as the merest straggler. Why it should come at all is beyond my comprehension, for it meets with a most hostile

[1] Mr. B. Dye has a fine specimen of adult female shot at Rollesby on March 17th, 1888. The ovary *contained* one egg as large as a Barcelona nut. This is a very early record.

reception in spite of close-season enactments and the careful and almost ceaseless vigilance of the watcher. It is ever an eligible addition to a "collection" whether the collector has "specimens" sufficient or not, for there is always a value attaching to its skin, and a "halo of conquest," so to speak, which unscrupulous shooters glory in wearing. The slaughter of an avocet is something more to be boasted of than the shooting of a dozen woodcocks. It may be the bird has an innate instinct, transmitted through generations, to visit the home of its forefathers; or, what is more likely, it is borne half unwittingly hither by atmospheric causes at the period of migratory flight.

It is an experience for a naturalist to get within binocular range of this avine beauty. On June 12th, 1905, a flock of no less than nine put in an appearance on Breydon, and I spent a most enjoyable evening in their company. At 7.30 p.m. on the 13th, I saw them in a compact flock on the wing; they sailed around for half a mile, and then alighted in shallow water. The tide was just at the full, and in a very short time they were floated off their feet entirely. They swam with the buoyancy of tufted ducks, which, at a distance, they greatly resembled, as they bobbed up and down on the ripple with their heads drawn in. I pushed to within a hundred yards of them, and distinctly saw that they were swimming, one and another occasionally popping its head under water, as if to reach the bottom, keeping the tail perpendicular by the aid of the feet, as ducks do. A small gull accompanied them, apparently much interested in their movements; and I have before noted that with the black-headed gulls stray avocets have been on the most amicable terms, even remaining to sleep in their company, as if satisfied that their vigilance and alertness to detect any sign of danger could be depended on. Even if they uttered no alarm-note, the patter of their feet when running to gain an impetus for flight makes sufficient sound to waken them.

My chum Dye was with me in my punt, straining his failing eyes to get but a glimmer of their presence; so carefully sculling up to within thirty yards of them, I put them up, when they filed off in extended line, coming between the setting sun and Ben, who, to his intense delight, caught their

shadow as they crossed him. They wheeled round once or twice and again settled, near the "Lumps."

Two or three other boats were hovering in my wake, among them being that of the restless watcher, for he was pretty well aware that, concealed under the foredeck of at least one punt, there lay hidden a fowling-piece, whose owner hung around far into the night with a fugitive hope of tiring out the representative of the law and of getting, as local slaughterers put it, "a clip at 'em." But I do not think success attended his efforts then, although I am not so sure that the whole of the birds got safely away. I noticed one bird walked slightly lame, as if it had been pricked by a shot. The flock remained that (Friday) night and until the following day, in the afternoon of which a very severe thunderstorm broke over Breydon, during which they disappeared. This flock of nine avocets is probably the largest number that has been at one time on Breydon for more than half a century. The late Fielding Harmer, writing in 1890, remarks on the six[1] seen on May 3rd, 1887. "I have never known so many at one time to be seen on Breydon," he writes, and his acquaintance with that estuary dated back to 1854.

Without the slightest doubt, many more rare species come to Breydon than are ever heard of. Some may drop in to feed and rest at night, and are gone by daybreak. And among the flocks of commoner birds there must often be strange sandpipers. The "obtaining" of pectoral and broad-billed sandpipers, and other locally scarce forms, has seldom been deliberate, as that of a larger stork or a spoonbill may be; for unlike these, they so closely resemble both in size and general appearance such common species as dunlins, curlew-sandpipers, and the like, that they have invariably been unidentified until after a promiscuous and random slaughter. And here I must admit that, but for the gun, their presence would never have been detected; and to my mind, in this solitary argument, the sportsman scores. Personally, however, I am content to remain ignorant rather than indulge in wholesale massacre for the sake, or for the mere possibility, of securing a rarity, or adding a new species to the county fauna.

[1] Fielding Harmer mentions but five. There were six, to my knowledge, and *four* were killed.

Redshanks are merry enough on the flats in May, whither they repair in the intervals of their household duties, to feed and gossip with old friends who come later southward. They will muster up in larger numbers in August, when young and old gather together in quite respectable flocks—I have seen a hundred in a bunch—from the Bure and Waveney marshes.

The extension of the close season until September is a real boon to this species, which formerly was sadly decimated by shooters who found it a ready target, and easily decoyed within gunshot by the most imperfect mimicry of its call-notes. Its habit of sitting on a rail and clicking is familiar to most people who know its haunts. It has an odd way, too, of lifting its wings abovehead to their greatest extent, as if proud of the length of its primaries! The redshank persistently feeds in a chosen spot until the tide fairly lifts it off its legs; and so daintily clean is it that it will stop feeding to put in position a refractory feather, or wash the tiniest speck of mud from its plumage. Its cousin the greenshank, a far noisier bird, comes in ones and twos in May, and attracts attention by its restless and impulsive manners; and whilst the redshank flies in a well-sustained and circular fashion, "greenie" darts along with jerky suddenness, hesitates a-wing, in dragon-fly fashion, and goes ahead again, showing more white behind than you suspected it was wearing.

One never tires of watching the peculiarities of individual species; and snugly ensconced in the well of our punt, under the lee of the rugged edge of a tide-worn flat, the patient watcher gets glimpses of ways and manners such as the restless never dream of. Sometimes these hunting parties will mix together right good-naturedly, 'one touch of nature'—supper hunting—making the bird-world kin. A party of dunlins, resplendent in coats of variegated brown and black, with vests of jetty hue, come nimbly running along, "*pick! pick! pick!*" as they move, snatching at *Corophium* and mudworm, delving deeply for those that hide. Trilly piping—the ringed plovers join them, running and picking—picking and running; among them may be odd Kentish plovers and little stints; while you may hear, too, the "*wick! wick!*" of the sanderling, which you may recognise most easily by its speckled gorget. By some common

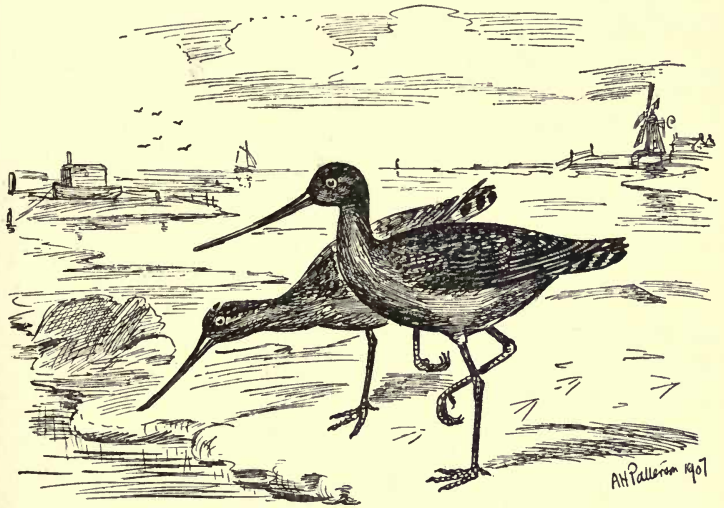
impulse every little wader takes to flight—it may be for a momentary spell of exercise, or maybe some warning cry, not understood by those hidden in the punt, puts all to wing—and after wheeling around with quite military precision of method, probably deciding as they turn that it was a false alarm, presently down they drop, and at once scatter again to feed, apparently with greater hurry, as if to make up for lost time. You might almost imagine they fed by piecework!

If there be a breeze blowing you will be interested in observing them feeding head to wind; and should one turn a moment to snatch up a worm it has unwittingly passed by, and the wind ruffles some of its wing coverts, how quickly it right-about-faces and attends to those disorderly feathers before beginning to feed again! On taking to wing, after a sweep round once or twice, they decide to settle in a new location. You will always observe them fly past where they intend to alight, swing round into the wind again, and then alight—retracing their steps to the spot selected, and with their bills pointing to windward, recommence feeding.

When washed off the flats by a higher tide, away they hasten either to the beach or the marshes, the larger waders retiring to the ronds to await the ebbing of the waters. All of them seem to know instinctively when the water has fallen.

The greenshank, when feeding, selects some isolated tide pool, or oftener a shallow creek, along which he walks—he would run if he could—in a zigzag manner, snatching at frightened shrimps that hastily scurry to either side. He does not leave much of a creek unworked. The redshank often dips his head underwater, I am confident on spec., before he has ever sighted prey. The dunlin, more especially on the softer ooze, shows his dislike to a muddy worm, by running with it, dangling from his mandibles, to wash it in the shallows. You may see the avocet doing exactly the same thing, taking care that not a spot of mud shall soil his snowy breast. It is funny, too, to witness how a small wader, feeding at the extreme edge of a drain, and blown unexpectedly into it, will simply let the wind drift him across it, scarcely attempting to paddle as he goes; and then, scrambling up the opposite side, begin at once to trot and feed as if nothing had happened.

Other interesting birds that come in May are the godwit, the grey plover, the turnstone, and various terns. Rarer than either are the spotted shank, the red-necked phalarope, and the Temminck's stint. A catalogue of all the rare birds that have been seen during this month must include the roseate tern and the black-winged stilt. Several dates are mentioned in connection with the black-tailed godwit, and its smaller relation, the bar-tailed godwit, was at one time quite commonly met with. I myself have seen seventy at a time; but it has never been my good fortune to see those great influxes



"TWELFTH OF MAY—GODWIT-DAY." BAR-TAILED GODWITS

the older Breydoners delight to make mention of. But fortunately, whereas the *habitual* Breydoner may go day after day, and lament the absence of this handsome bird, a stranger may casually look round the day after and see quite a mustering of them. The uncertainty of the thing adds piquancy to the quest.

The smart grey plover, underclothed with deepest black and with variegated shawl of black and white, is commonly met with, and almost surely begs the visitor's notice by his plaintive calling. He is, to my mind, when in "tip-top" plumage, as handsome a bird as one can meet with in a long day's march.

The late Fielding Harmer, noting the black-winged stilt,

remarks: "I saw one on Breydon, May 19th, 1866, very wild [*sic*]. Same day it was shot at on Caister beach, but missed, and went away uninjured in a N.E. direction." What a pity it is we have not a line respecting its manners and its doings; the whole entry seems to suggest the injunction—"*Shoot it!*"

Booth was the first to detect the white-winged black tern on Breydon. Harmer says he saw Mr. Booth shoot four of them, "all at one discharge . . . at 3 a.m., on May 26th, 1871; where, seven years later, on May 8th, two gull-billed terns were also obtained."

In concluding this chapter, it may be as well to impress on those who should intend visiting this far-famed bird resort, that May is, without exception, the most interesting month in the year. Arrangements should be made beforehand with some well-known Breydoner to have his punt in readiness; and the flood tide should be chosen. If a south-easterly wind be prevailing, all the better.[1] The fact that disappointment may follow makes good the old saying, that "the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley." Says Fielding Harmer: ". . . In 1866, May 20th, and for three or four days after, godwits and knots were passing here in a N.E. direction in thousands, followed for several days by stragglers; but May, 1887, only two godwits were seen and four knots shot."

I myself have known a year to pass by without a solitary godwit being observed.

[1] Vide *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, pp. 237–8.

CHAPTER V

SUMMER HOURS ON BREYDON

THE month of June, like November, is by no means distinguished for its bird-life on Breydon. Most of the species that visited us in April and May have gone to their northern breeding places, and were it not for a few non-breeding stragglers that stay with us all summer through, and one or two species, as the ringed plover and redshank, which still, in scanty numbers, persist in nesting in the locality, Breydon flats would be bare indeed of birds.

A few fine adult saddle-backed gulls (*Larus marinus*) make themselves quite at home here all summer long, spending the days in indolence and ease. Hour after hour they will sit bunched up on the drier flats, scarcely troubling to turn when some boatman passes within easy gunshot, for the "artful old beggars," as nine out of ten Breydoners call them, appear to be fully aware that in summer they are free from molestation. With them a number of immature "greys," and occasionally odd birds in the blotched plumage of their third and fourth years, keep company. Shore-crabs at this season appear to be their favourite prey, and they will search for these with exemplary patience; sometimes, after the tide has left the flats, watching for the slightest movement of those crustaceans which skulk in the mud under the prostrate *Zostera*, and which seem to know that their safety lies in perfect motionlessness. I am inclined to believe that the least movement of a crab's watchful eye staring out of the mud, even when carapace and leg are covered, is sufficient to betray its owner to the keener yellow eye of the gull, who snatches it up in a moment, often with blades of "grass" hanging to it. A nip is given "amidships," and the crab, killed instantaneously, is at once devoured. Pools left on the flats are closely inspected, and any hapless smelt

or blenny, eel or "whitebait," unwittingly imprisoned there is very soon pounced upon and swallowed.

Small fish, even a short time out of their native element, when thrown over again, often float or struggle helplessly on or near the surface of the stream. The shrimpers, sorting their catches in the harbour, throw back many of the useless fishes taken, e.g. pogges, bullheads, small whitings, flatfishes, and frequently bibs. The last-named especially come upstream in a helpless condition, their eyes bulging with terror and air. These are an especial tit-bit for the gulls, and if the few black-heads that haunt the entrance to Breydon in summer miss them, or pass them by as too big for swallowing, the larger gulls will find them, stranded by the sluggish tides, on the water-line at the margin of the flats, for frequently successive tides fail to cover the mud-flats, especially during the neaps. Who knows what else they may pick up out of the hundred edibles that float upstream from a populous town, from dead dogs downwards?

Several curlews, which I take to be either old non-breeders or last year's latest hatched birds, not infrequently remain with us, more or less all summer, taking short trips for two or three days at a time to the Wells marshes (where I have seen them) or some other favourite resort. Shilling-sized crabs, now so abundant, are their favourite prey, and the larger *nereids*, more inclined to wander, prompted by their reproductive instincts, are as eagerly searched for.

Belated migrants are now and then met with. It may be that some infirmity has made them slow of wing, or disappointment at pairing time has made them laggards. I saw a hooded crow loafing around Breydon on June 17th, 1906. On the same date a pair of little terns were winging their way around the flats. The female evidently was an invalid, for her faithful mate industriously fished for her as well as for himself. Three grey plovers, all grand fellows, were hunting about at the margin of a creek on June 7th, 1898, as contentedly and leisurely as if it were the earlier half of May. A dunlin was with us as late as June 7th, 1906, whilst a party of youngsters had come south as early as July 7th! Spoonbills in June are nothing unusual, and immature birds will remain contentedly here if unmolested all summer through. Among the unusual occurrences I have noted

was a flock of quite four hundred dunlins, that on June 22nd, 1899, dashed by my houseboat in a compact body. There was a goodly tide, and a high north-east wind blowing. Only two days before I observed some fine adult birds feeding leisurely with some ringed plovers, as if in no hurry to depart.

Some fine old herons visit us daily all through summer, having now not only themselves to keep, but there are flounders and eels to be taken back to Reedham for their little ones in the heronry. Occasionally a grand old male bird hunches himself up on a flat, or stands uncomfortably perched on some drifted basket or log for a long quiet nap, free for a while from the clamour of his hungry family, for whom he has to cater industriously by day, and by whom, no doubt, his slumbers are often broken at night. I have seen quite a baby heron making his initial efforts at fish-capture as early as June 26th. Young herons, scarcely so cunning as their elders, may be easily distinguished at a distance by their darker plumage and more ragged appearance. They have a habit, too, of pitching down into "knee-deep" water and remaining there, patiently waiting, Micawber-like, for such silly little fishes as may turn up; and here they will remain until some hapless eel comes within range of the quickly outshot mandibles, or until, wearied by continued ill-luck, another locality is decided upon. The old birds, grown artful with years, show far more energy, and will stealthily march along a drain, or by the side of a flat, with measured step, turning up something for themselves. A fish must indeed be sharp to dash into deeper water and evade that quick bill-thrust and keener eye.

A young heron, too, is by no means so discreet as his sire, who very promptly drops an eel or a flounder he considers too big to swallow. If there be but the slightest hope of getting it down, the fish is not thrown away for want of kneading and shaking; but a junior has no eye for proportion, and will waste a very long time over a hopelessly large victim, and will at length be robbed of it by some other heron, or will reluctantly let it go again, feeling annoyed with himself, no doubt, for having wasted so much time, and let so many more eligible fish go by.

One of the most ludicrous sights I ever watched was a

young heron fishing in a shallow drain, not a great way from my houseboat. He had struck at and seized a flounder much too large to swallow, no matter what efforts he might make to do so. For nearly twenty minutes he shook and nipped and kneaded it, alternating these exercises by most convulsive efforts to engulf it in his capacious throat. Over and over the bird brought it again to his bill-end, dropping it in the shallow as it grew weaker. After being thus occupied for some eight minutes, a black-headed gull or two edged up to him, and watched his manœuvres; other gulls drew up from mere curiosity, wondering what the others were so interested in. In five minutes more than forty of them were surrounding him, and still they came. Soon there were a hundred, and still they came, running, craning their necks, and some occasionally speeding their coming by short flights. Those on the far side of the flat most certainly did not know what they were running for, but they still converged and drew up, until eventually quite two hundred gulls were surrounding the industrious heron, who had been all this time intent upon swallowing that unfortunate fish. Suddenly, as if aware of the commotion he was causing, and despairing of his efforts, he dropped the coveted flounder and took to wing in disgust. I could almost imagine him feeling foolish and abashed at so many other birds witnessing his discomfiture.

The town rooks are still busy feeding along the tide-margin, spending more of their time here than on the marshes. Like the local starlings, they seem to acquire quite a taste for carrion, both terrestrial and marine. In May I have observed the old ones picking up the tiny crustaceans—the shorehopper, and probably *Corophium*, to take home to their young ones in the treetops near the market-place. Astonishing numbers must be collected, for they may be observed snapping up these "trifles" with almost the alacrity of dunlins, and from under their lower mandible quite a walnut-sized bag of them is collected. Half a dozen rooks with these pouches distended, look exceedingly odd. In a week or so they will be bringing their now well-fledged youngsters to share their hunting with them, not at first insisting upon their catching for themselves, but disgorging into their capacious mouths their often

unsavoury gleanings, while they flutter and croak and hop around their elders in a most energetic fashion.

One would hardly dream of such a *rara avis* as Pallas' sandgrouse visiting Breydon, a place so ill-adapted to its habits, that its appearance there could have been but accidental. The late Fielding Harmer, in a very meagre reference to this species, mentioned the fact of six having been seen "crossing" Breydon on June 12th, 1863 (in which year sixty were recorded for Norfolk). I have recorded the shooting of one example[1] when in company with several grey plovers *on the walls.*

But an old sportsman, once the crack puntsman on Breydon, narrated to me one evening, in 1905, his experiences with a bird of this species.

During that "invasion" of sandgrouse he fell in with eleven, on a flat near the "lower run," and had very little difficulty in getting within range. They rose just as he was about to fire, and when he pulled the trigger, the gun most annoyingly hung fire; but on the charge exploding, it dropped out the hindmost bird. *The feet were very muddy.* The remainder flew away, and he had to be content with one. He took the bird to the late Mr. Owles (a chemist who was an excellent microscopist, but not a bird expert), who "couldn't find anything like it in the books." He then proceeded with the bird to the "Royal," where his chief, Captain L——, was staying (he, like my informant, then a sergeant-major, was an officer in the Artillery Militia).

Pestell left the bird there, the Captain being out, and an officer, who had been abroad, recognised it as the sandgrouse. On returning to the hotel to hear more about the bird, Pestell was met by the Captain's wife.

"What a job!" said she; "a fellow at Horsey has shot several!" which was a direct suggestion that the rarity and consequent value of the bird as a "specimen" had greatly deteriorated. However, the parties eventually came to terms, and the bird was placed in the Longe collection.

"Just my luck," said Pestell; "had I gone at the right moment, and caught the Captain at home——"

"What?" I asked.

"Why, I could ha' made more on it!" said he, with a snap, annoyed at the recollection.

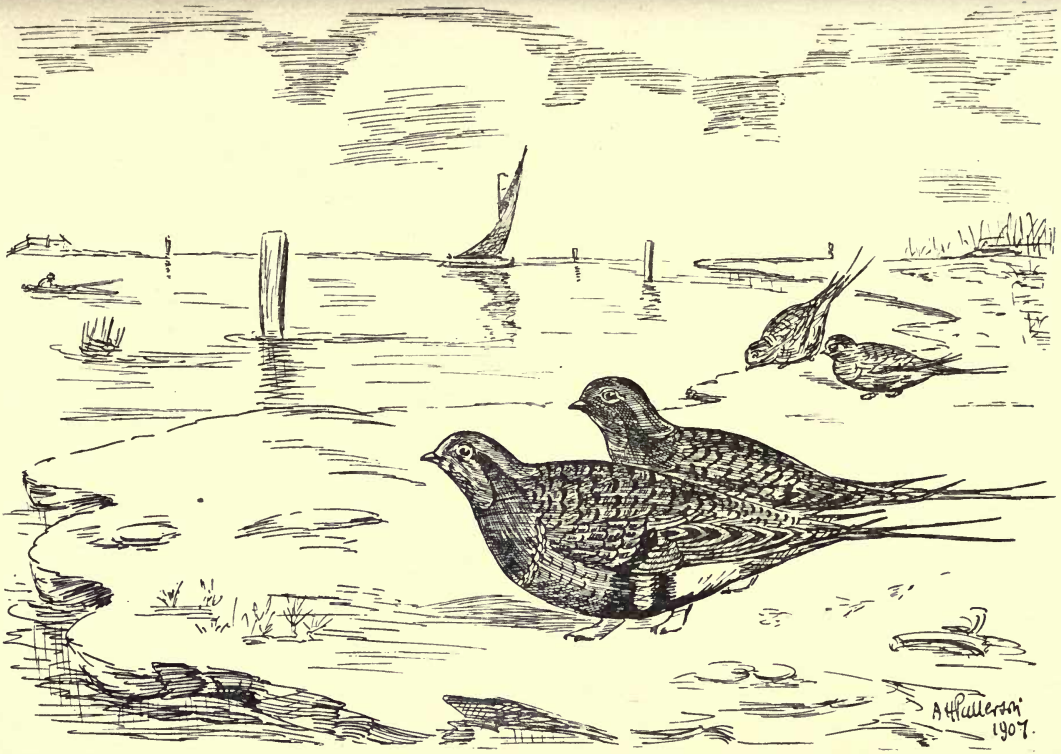
[1] Vide *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, pp. 201–3.

A CHAPTER OF MISHAPS

June 20th.—Up for an hour or two on Breydon this fine evening, on a gentle tide. The gulls are merrily supping off "whitebait," which are flashing by myriads at the margin of Breydon, and the birds have but to sit quietly on the water and snap at the fry that sportively fling themselves out of the water all round them. Even the shore-crabs are hurrying into the shallows, driving up here and there a frightened little swimmer, and seizing the victims right adroitly in their pincer-claws. Huge jelly-fishes, turning their great discs this way and that, and waving their many *ciliæ* as they go, are floating upstream without aim or definite purpose; many of them will get stranded on the edge of the flats as the tide falls, and be left there to be wonderingly looked at by the gulls, who will perhaps tear long gelatinous strips out of them to see whether they be tasty or not, while the crabs will scuttle by, also wondering for whatever use such flabby things can be.

It is an evening for reverie and quiet meditation. But for an occasional cry of some quarrelsome gull, or the mellow calls of some restless ringed plover or redshank, silence would reign, to be made the more profound perhaps by the deep melancholy wail of a distant curlew. Two or three wherries have passed slowly up-channel, with just sufficient breeze to keep them ahead of the tide; a curl of faint blue smoke hovers over the head of yon wherry-man, whose huge sail looms black against the western sky. The sun, glowing redder as it nears the edge of the night cloud, grows larger and larger, and dips—dips perceptibly—behind it, showing a crimson streak here and there in the crevices of the cloud-bank, and sinks altogether directly behind it, throwing up streaks of golden light, as if bidding the world good night with a last pleasant smile. Yellow, and pale green, and a deeper hue succeed the glow of sunset, and the lately sun-lighted fragments of cloud overhead turn to purple, grey, and black. Night soon creeps on, and the full moon rises in the east, to reflect in her quieter way the more effulgent beauties of the king of day.

It is time to turn the boat round and make for home. The dew is falling, and the air becoming a little chilly; but this



ON STRANGE GROUND. PALLAS' SAND-GROUSE

matters little to those who row sturdily and well. The "lights o' Yarmouth" burn clear and bright.

We run our punt up close against the smelt-boat of "Snicker" Larn, and enjoy a quiet little gossip between strokes. "Snicker," as usual, "ain't done much." These sly old water-dogs never do, no matter how good a haul they may really have made. It is the amateur fisherman who has done little who usually magnifies his catches. . . .

We got to chatting over one thing and another, when "Snicker" remarked :—

"Had I heard that Jary, the watcher, had had a tumble overboard?"

"No! how was that? I hope he tumbled out again!" said I.

"Oh, yes, 'bor! we got him out at the bridge yonder. He was lookin' at us smeltin' over there, up the Five-stake drain, standin' up in his punt, the fule, and he bumps agin Stake 2, takin' him sheer off his balance; in course, over he goes. Gord bless me! my 'art cums up in my mouth, and we hurries up to let go the draught-lines, and jumps in and rows for him.

"And he can't swim!" I remarked.

"No! but he chucks hisself over somehow on his back, and takes things remarkabill quiet, but he'd lost one of his butes and his iley jumper afore we nabs hold of him and pulls him in. I've seen a sight of axerdents on here. They tell me you had a rum go the other night close to yer house-boat!" While saying this he smiles, and nudges "Short 'un."

"Oh, yes!" I replied, laughing, for an accident seems to have a comic side, sometimes, when we come out of it all right. "Oh, yes; in a moment of forgetfulness I let my sail get foul of a stake, and standing on the forepeak to push it away to save splitting it, it gybed quicker than I expected, and I had either to slip in or hang to the stake."

"I've seed a monkey up a stick," said Larn, smiling.

"It's well," I said, "I had a long painter trailing behind the punt, which I nabbed at the psychological moment, and hauled the punt back, and so saved a wade ashore."

"That *wor* the minnet!" he grinned, "and you and poor old Blind Ben had a rum go there, agin that big chain cable o' that Rushen ship agin Saul's timber yard."

"We had," I replied. "Ben was rowing, pulling either oar a bit harder as I ordered him, and he must get wool-gathering and pull the wrong one, and a strong tide pushed us under the cable at the spot it sank into Breydon."

"At the *sykerlodgital* moment!" said Larn, smiling again.

"Ben and I had a rough time that night when the *Norfolk Lass* was lost."

"I remember," interjected Larn.

"We were overtaken by that bit of wind, and had a fine doing to; one big wave pushed us a bit awkwardly near the mud and snapped one oar-blade off: I had to row with the sound oar to wind'ard, and the other hitting the mudbank, to get along."

"Reg'lar wooden-leg-like, 'bor," said he. "I seed Y—— that day when he was sailin' his punt up the 'Ship' drain. He was kinder wool-gatherin', and one wrong stroke of the steerin' oar ran him up the steep side of the flat, and havin' the sheet fast, over she turns, as neat as a deever [diver]. Ah! 'bor, you'd need be careful up here. Old drunken 'Bugles' had the narrerest escapes I ever know'd annyboddy to hev. He wor too drunk to swim, but allers got fished out in the nick o' time—except once: you remember——"

"Yes, go on," said I.

"Well, one night he'd got as full as a teek [bed-tick] and arter he'd tied up his punt agin the houseboat, tumbles in hid over heels. I seed him nex' mornin', blaggardin' and fumin': and a nice mess he wor in. He'd got out, and couldn't remember nothin' more till he comes to the houseboat door blinkin' like a scrache-owl.

"'Wheer've you bin?' I axes him.

"'Gord abuve know!' says he, 'I'm in a pritty pickle!' And so he wor. He'd got out somehow—you could see his futmarks in the mud—and gone to sleep soaked through, and worn't dry then—*out'ardly*, anyway."

"I never got to the bottom of Neave's job there, when he slipped off the dredger up the 'Ship' drain, Larn," I said.

"Look 'ere," said Larn, "that happened in '70 suffin'; after that flood, when the walls was onderminded—wheer they made the boarded quay. Bessey's drain useter swing round, and the whole force of the water struck the wall. They dug the new cut from agin the old 'ship' more on the slope, so as to

set the water off more to the north'ard. Arter they'd dug down a bit with hard tools they got the dredger up and finished the job. Old 'Vamps' Neave was watchman, and he gits a bit full, you know, and goes up in an old Norwegian pram, and makes a mess gitten aboard, slippin' off the plank, you know; but he catches his finger-inds on it and hangs like grim death. When they found him, a'most onconscious, two or three hours arterwards, they could hardly break his grasp. Gord bliss my sowl and body! I've picked up several dade people, and couldn't break their hand-hold—if it's only a stone, they never let go.

"Drink, sir, yes! it's mostly that an' accidents go togither. Old 'Pintail's' father—he'd bin lookin' arter Lawyer Preston's houseboat, up theer by the 'Fleet': they was after a few pike and tench and perch—perch? Yes, theer wor plenty in them days in the Fleet 'deek.' 'Son' Ford and old Johnny was goin' to Yarmith for grub an' that, and they was both pritty full, and they makes the sheet fast. A puff of wind turns 'em over. Johnny sunk, and 'Son' Ford—(his son, 'Sonny' Ford 's alive now)—hangs to the upturned punt, and we pulls him out. We hurried down to the beach and got some skate-lines, and havin' marked the stakes, and allowed for the tide, rows in two boats; at the first haul we'd hooked him.

"The masterpiece blow I was ever in," continued Larn, "was one September. We was smeltin' on the flats, and I says to old 'Blue,' 'I don't like the looks o' that squall workin' up,' so we hurries in the nets and was half full of water afore we'd got 'em in. That same breeze (it was from the nor'ard) blowed the sail clean out of the wherry *Lucy*—she was loden with forty ton o' coal, and driv her on the south, and filled her nearly level with the coombin's. Oby, the skipper, hallered for me, and we had to go and take him off, or he'd a-perished durin' the night, the cabin bein' full o' water. You'd hardly think as things could turn up so rough up here till you know'd for yerself!"

By this time we had landed at the entrance to the Bure.

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Many stories of accidents, some of a serious and others of a humorous kind, might be related of men who "follow" Breydon. Two of the latter, each disagreeable to the chief participant, I may mention.

Some years ago a crank "followed" Breydon, at intervals, with a big gun that had an unpleasant knack of kicking. He was known as "The Tailor." One foggy morning he gave his fellow punters a great fright as he "loomed up" out of the dense mist, and drew up to the quayside. His face was as red as though it had been dipped in blood; but he did not seem to know it. On inquiry he admitted that when pulling at a bunch of fowl the gun had kicked him badly on his nose, which started bleeding, and behaved in a most refractory manner as he hastily rowed for home. He had endeavoured to stanch the bleeding with his big wool mittens, and in so doing had besmeared his face all over, and the trickling blood, freezing on his moustache and beard, gave him a most gruesome appearance, as may be imagined.

In January, 1907, a gentleman gunner was shooting on Breydon with one of the natives, and seeing a pochard too far on the flat to be reached with a charge of shot he essayed to walk to it. Now, to any one not used to the muddy flats, a slip sooner or later becomes a certainty; and in his haste the sportsman managed to slip, falling full length, face downwards, in a particularly nasty patch of ooze. He looked a pathetic figure, besmeared from top to toe with the vilest of mud, and with one boot that had come off, in his hand, as he made for the punt. It was a cruelly cold day. To add to his chagrin the pochard took to wing and flew towards a "corner," alighting near where Y—— was in hiding with his punt-gun. Within a couple of minutes the pochard was in his punt. I saw the bird hanging next day on Y——'s haberdashery stall in the market, sharing one corner of it with a number of fine male wigeon and some woollen stockings—all alike on sale.

FLOUNDER CATCHING

By the end of the 70's Breydon flats had so "grown up" that considerable changes had taken place in the habits of the local fauna, and correspondingly in the occupations of the local Breydoners. Grey mullet, which to this day haunt the deeper channels in some numbers, prior to the 70's used to swarm over the flats, undoubtedly drawn there by a love

of certain species of semi-marine vegetation and the animal life that swarmed among it. Flounders, too, came up the then clearer, quieter, and more accessible river in great numbers, spending much of their time in shrimp and mollusc hunting, and growing fat on their well-fed prey and the juicy "cabbage" (*Ulva lactuca*) they swarmed on. The tides did not always leave the flats bare, and there was a greater alternation of salt and fresh water, and of the latter a more frequent abundance, which suited them. The local Breydoners possessed several nets, both draw-nets, especially manufactured to catch the wily mullet, and stake-nets for the flounders. To-day, on any wind from the south-west round to south-east and a point or two beyond, either way, some of the higher flats will remain dry for days, becoming pale brown in colour, and white in patches with the salt left by the evaporation of the moisture. These alterations reduced netting to a very poor business indeed. I once helped an old friend with his net, and for a tide we captured two little flounders and more weeds than we wanted.

"Butts," as we term flounders here, were, in my very early days, caught in immense numbers, and mostly sold for crab-bait. Only a few riverside folk troubled, in those palmy days of the local trawling industry (now practically extinct), to cook these luscious, firm-eating fishes. A "butt"-net was a "trammel" measuring about seventy yards in length; four nets would be staked in line. The trammel, which was a net about four or five feet deep, was made with a small, loose, light-meshed net in the centre, with two coarse-meshed nets affixed on either side, so that a fish, in dashing against the obstruction, simply pushed the small net through a big loop, and so bagged itself like a rabbit. The nets were affixed at high water, when the flounders had scattered themselves all over the flats to feed; and they were intercepted on their way back to the channels and drains when the falling tide uncovered the flats. Then came the fisherman with his boat and "trunks"—boxes perforated with holes (like eel-trunks, but larger)—and the struggling fishes were soon liberated, only to be imprisoned again, until sufficient were captured to be sent away. Carters drove over from Cromer and Sheringham, and gave half a crown per hundred, of six score to the hundred. Their days were

Tuesdays and Fridays. "Fifty and sixty yeer ago wor the time," old Breydoners will tell you; "*them* wor the days when a Breydoner could git a livin'."

It may be interesting to those who prefer the aristocratic lobster to the plebeian edible crab, to state that the latter is one of the cleanest feeders possible, and nothing but the freshest and sweetest morsels will attract him; even his little cousin, the ubiquitous shore-crab, I am confident prefers a live, fat shrimp, or a toothsome smelt which he has caught in some "low," to the viler carrion he is usually accredited with being partial to. On the other hand, the lobster has the most depraved appetite, and any garbage is good enough to tempt him to his destruction. In the old days the North Norfolk catchers used to rely greatly on open hoop-nets with which to ensnare their prey, and in bad weather the crabs ran away with much bait. The well-known "pots" are now exclusively used.

To-day flounders are by no means so plentiful, and no one specially nets for them; but should a few score of them happen to get mixed up with the catches in the smelt-nets they are not despised, for the smelter can dispose of them to the fried-fish purveyor, or can use them for his own table. When eel-picking is in progress flounders are often struck by the pick, which usually cuts them badly; but for all that, if one is halved by the cut, the fisherman will tell you, "Well, 'bor, that ain't much account; if he's a big 'un, we can eat both inds on him!"

I must confess to a great partiality for the toothsome "butt," and in my summer holidays on Breydon I always take my "butt"-pick as well as my eel-pick. It is nice to tumble out of the houseboat into the punt and repair to the nearest drain, and having stabbed a few "butts," to row back and clean them, and drop them into the waiting fry-pan before the "kick" has fairly died out of them. A few hours' drying in the air makes them even better eating. A few viviparous blennies, skinned and fried with them, make a dish fit for a king.

Flounders running to a very large size come up the river in December and January, when they spawn, and frequent the deeper waters and the confluence of the Bure and the Yare. They are then excellent eating, as they are again in

August, when they have been prowling about the flats, and are known as "grass-fed butts." The winter "butt-*darting*" is a laborious process, only followed now by an occasional amateur, for the catches are small compared with those obtained forty or fifty years ago, when "darting" was a remunerative employment. The dart is a rake-like pronged instrument, with seven or eight long barbs, and a spread of two feet. A shaft at least twenty-four feet is necessary. The boat drifts with the tide, and the fisherman mechanically jabs his rude instrument up and down a few inches as he floats. In frosty weather, from the continual running of water up the shaft as it is held horizontally, in order to knock off an impaled fish, a coating of ice will form so thickly that it is almost impossible to grasp it. The fish die quickly, and freeze as they struggle. This reads cold-blooded; but is it half as cruel and callous as the methods of an angler whose fish, useless when obtained, die at the bottom of his boat by inches?

It were best for me to confess at once that I enjoy the recreation of a little summer "butt"-sticking! Every sportsman, I suppose, makes apology for the pain he inflicts upon the particular section of the brute creation he delights to torture; but he does not always make public confession of it. I like a bit of eel-picking too, although I do not wilfully delight in causing pain to any living creature. The pork butcher, least sentimental of all men, may perhaps have his regretful moments! I purpose for a page or two to take the reader with me on a little "picking" excursion. You must not mind the *mud*, so characteristic of Breydon and all Norfolk waterways. It will be fun, although the poor flounders might well say with the frogs, "What is fun to you is death to us."

Herons and great "grey" gulls closely study the habits of the flounder, and account for hundredweights in the course of a year; they wade and paddle in the shallows, hunting for them. Did you ever see a heron strike, seize, and then attempt to swallow a fair-sized specimen? If you have not, you should do so; you will see a rare display of craft, adroitness, and contortion, and you will wonder that the fish, whose progress down the bird's throat is distinctly seen, does not choke, or that the stiff ventral spine on the flounder does

not stick fast in the heron's gullet, which would also lead to the same untimely end. No sooner is it down that eighteen-inch gullet than the heron takes a sip of water—fresh or salt, as the case may be—tries to look happy, and then reassumes his melancholy pose, waiting for another victim.

Why the flounder goes by the local name of "butt" I cannot decide, nor could a Lancashire fisherman say why he calls it a "fluke." However, let that pass, and take this butt-pick, get into the punt, and let us away to the Breydon drains. A summer butt-pick is a far lighter weapon than one used in winter. Mine is, you see, a home-made affair—a ten-foot rod with a cross-piece of wood, into which are inserted five or six straightened cod-hooks. Yours is a lightly-made iron one, with far smaller tines than those used in winter. We shall get among the flounders in the shallows, often in two feet of water, "thickened" with the silt drawn from the flats by many little creeks. In clear water the "butts" are quick to discern you, and to dart away in haste. It is seldom you see a "butt" before you feel it on the pick or dart. Please understand that a flounder is not a dab. Scientists name the first *Pleuronectes flesus;* the other *P. limanda.* The former prefers a muddy bottom, and corresponds with it in colour. Now and again he prowls over shelly bottoms. But the dab is a lighter-hued fish, preferring a sandy habitat; hence his name of sand-dab. He is more delicately flavoured, spawns at a different season, and seldom indeed visits Breydon. Now to our sport.

June 30th, 6 p.m.—A fine June day, with a strong ebb tide running. The sun is making his way across a gold-freckled sky towards his rest. A few black-headed gulls are gossiping on the mudflats instead of being at home with their friends at Hoveton or Scoulton.

6.15.—Reached the "Ship" drain after a stiff pull up channel. From our low punt Breydon looks dreary with its vast plateau of mud, bare as a desert, and redolent of seaweed. What possessed Turner to overlook such a rare subject for a master pencil? Yon yachting party, hard aground on the mud, would make a pretty object in the foreground of any picture—especially if the expressions of the stranded crew could be "caught," as well as their anathemas!

6.20.—Tied the punt to a stump of the old hulk *Agnes*. In 1876 her hull would have passed for a relic of Nelson's fleet. In Nelson's day she ploughed (slowly enough) the main, bringing fruits and wines from the Straits. Since I have sawn off the old dog figure-head, it would puzzle a novice to tell which was stem and which was stern! What rare birds have settled on the flat, against which, to block a troublesome creek, she was moored and scuttled—avocets, spoonbills, black stork, broad-billed sandpiper, and many another!

6.40.—Commenced darting. He who picks sets at naught the science, the art, the traditions of angling, and of sporting proper, so says Piscator, who will sit a whole tide out and come smiling home with a half-score undersized flounders, and the memory of having hauled out a bushel or two of useless shore-crabs, whose pincer-claws tore up nine-tenths of the bait—poor harmless shrimps, or naked mussels. Yet they term flounder-sticking cruel and barbarous amusement! They think nothing of impaling a living crustacean on a torturing hook, and having hooked a fish, of leaving the poor thing to die of suffocation. The flounder-sticker spares the shrimp, and hastens the death of his prey by a friendly stab! You cannot measure sport nor cruelty with a pair of callipers.

6.42.—I had been pondering thus whilst drifting and jabbing—jab! jab! jab! sometimes in muddy ooze where the cross-bar goes deeply in, and comes up heavy with mud; and then on a shelly bottom, thick with broken valves of clams, the relics of many a generation. Here's a fish! Up quickly comes the dart, with a fine flounder wriggling on two of the tines; a sharp crack on the head stuns it, and knocks it on to the floor-boards.

6.45.—Impaled two crabs: one kicking excitedly, the other dead as a stone, the tine having gone through the centre of him. A pin-prick at the sharp apex of his pointed, curled-up tail is at once fatal. The "heart" lies immediately under here.

6.50.—Jab! jab! jab! We came across a bed of soft weeds thrown in a subterranean heap by some peculiar eddy. We can hardly pull the pick up for the weight that adheres to it.

6.55.—Got him! This time we had a splendid fish, with two tines holding him fast, the blood trickling freely from both wounds. He is soon kicking out on the floor-boards the life remaining in him. Who said he is in agony? The fish surely is, if not entirely, all but cold-blooded, and does not feel pain like a wounded snipe or a stricken hare. Anglers would think fish have no right to feel at all: they ardently hope they do not. And many actions and doings of fish, which I have observed, have gone far to prove to me that their sensitiveness to pain is not acute. A fish is firmer and sweeter for being bled: most Dutchmen bleed and otherwise kill their primer fish. Our own fishermen, I fear, do not wait for a turbot or a plaice to die before gutting them! I have never heard or read a protest against these methods.

6.58.—My watch, like my waistcoat, is becoming begrimed with mud. You can't help it; and no Sunday suits should be brought on to Breydon, where a splash of a wave will stain your sleeve. I now had to rub the watch-glass on my elbow to see its hands. Two more fishes impaled: one half-grown, the other no larger than a Transvaal medal. Now we stab three large ones at once. So fishes *feel*. Do they? And it is cruel work! Isn't all butchery cruel? The butcher kills of necessity. Does he? Vegetarians would say no! to that! You will eat your beefsteak without remorse. *I* like a pan of fish, and of my own catching, too!

7.5.—Still jabbing. Fast again. This time I haul out a rusty iron pan! It is

7.12 before I get clear of it; and having straightened three hooks that had bent, continue my jabbing.

7.15.—At the corner of George's "deek." Here the boat grates on a bed of shells that is probably several feet thick; a boat's length away is a fearfully deep hole, scoured and scooped out by eddying currents. We cannot reach bottom. We find fish lying at the entrance of each of the little tributary creeks that now empty their waters like so many midget waterfalls. We get a lot of fish here; and by

7.30.—We have had sufficient sport; we must have caught enough to fill two buckets. Our arms ache with the unwonted exercise—ache "fit to come off."

8 *p.m.*—The sun is setting. All over the west it illumines the blotches and streaks of fleecy clouds, which glow with

vivid red and gold, while the radiant sky is reflected by the moist flats. The ripple, Burgh-wards, is afire with the sun; the blaze dazzles the eye. No sunsets can equal those of Breydon. Little by little the fire dies out, and now from burning embers the clouds turn greyer, and yet greyer, until at length only the upper edge of that purple curtain hung in the west is touched with glowing brass, and then purpling, too, all die away to vapoury-looking masses. We find ourselves fast aground; but who remembers the greasy, muddy flats when peering into heaven?

The gulls got up just now and went silently in a big wedge-shaped flock to roost upon the sea-waves. Harsh croak of heron and mellow piping of plover break the quiet of eventide.

8.30.—We gather our harvest of the estuary into a hamper, mop down decks and bottom-boards, and row for home.

One fine summer night Blind Ben and I had been doing good business among the creeks, and had filled our basket. It was past the hour of midnight when, having left the punt beside the *Moorhen* and walked home by the marshes, we reached the North Quay. The policeman on duty that night must have been sleeping in some quiet corner. Coming to a lamp, we stayed to divide our plunder, which we shot out on the pavement, and sat down to count it between us. The aroma of our catch spread far and wide, and we had not gone many yards before one night-prowling tabby, and then another of different hue, came to share the—*smell!* It was an exceedingly funny thing to see the cats concentrating their forces, coming to the wet spot on the pavement as wheel-spokes to a common hub! And there we left them to their own devices!

* * * * * *

BREYDON TERNS AT HOME

For many years the comings and goings of those delightful and dainty seabirds have interested me; and having heard such glowing accounts of their nesting habits on the North Norfolk foreshore, I availed myself of the first opportunity of taking a trip to their native haunts.

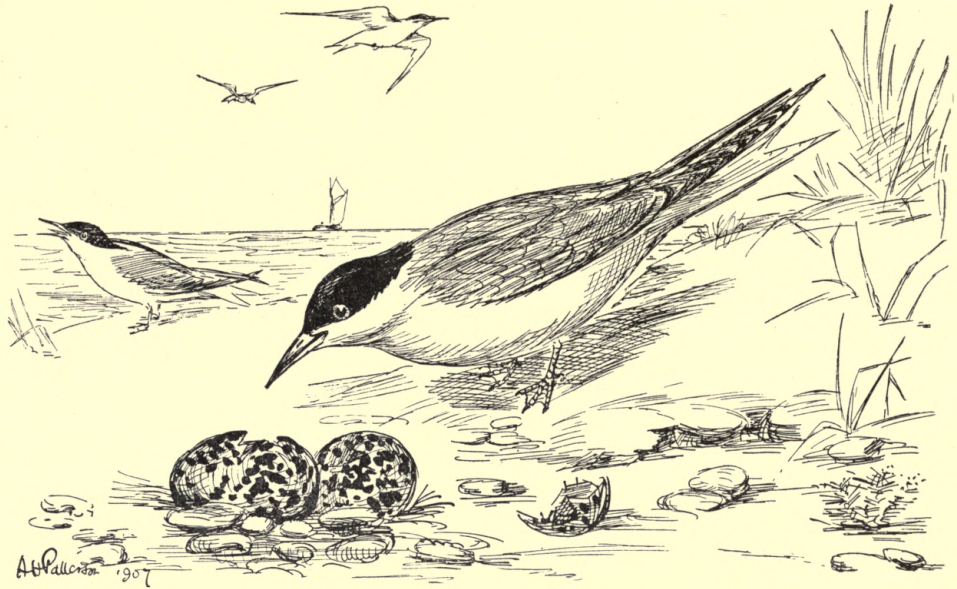
On Whit-Monday, June 12th, 1905, I paid a flying visit to

the quaint old town of Wells and, in company with Dr. S. H. Long, of Norwich, spent a couple of hours in exploring the marshes extending immediately from the town-front to the seashore. The tide was out, leaving exposed, in the bed of the creek that passes for a river, patches of mussel-covered mud. A single common tern was hungrily eyeing the rather turbid bit of water from a few yards above the surface, making more pretence at than really fishing. With a little trouble we crossed over to the marsh in a boat.

The tramping and scrambling and leaping across the rough marshland, intersected by numerous sharply-cut creeks that wound round about in every direction, and traversed by well-worn trails leading seawards, was made interesting by reason of meeting with forms of plant-life which, with the exception of the Michaelmas daisy (*Aster tripolium*), the jointed glasswort, and the aromatic sea-southernwood, were altogether different from those of my own neighbourhood. The thrift was conspicuously sprinkled around, with tufts and clumps of the shrub-like *Sucæda fruticosa* in equal abundance. The creeks and "pulk-holes" gave evidence of a varied fauna and invited research.

A pair of redshanks had much to say against our intrusion; they evidently had a nest somewhere in one of the higher tussocky corners, which would be awkwardly placed, however tempting the area generally, unless beyond the reach of the tidal water, which on the spring tides, I am assured, places the whole marsh under water. I thought it rather odd that there should be here a three hours' flood and a nine hours' ebb and, stranger still, that a twelve- and fourteen-foot rise is a usual thing, seeing that at Yarmouth, not so very far away, a six-foot tide is esteemed a good one! A couple of sheld-ducks most picturesquely broke the middle distance with a dash of conspicuous colouring, but they were exceedingly shy and quickly took to wing. On a subsequent visit, in 1906, I was fortunate enough to crawl on my hands and knees to a burrow in which, only a foot or more from the entrance, complacently sat the female on her complement of eggs.

The locality chosen by the terns for their nesting quarters is barely above the common level, and the sea-water, rising above the creeks, must at unusually high tides trickle into the



"WHAT'S BEEN HERE?" COMMON TERNS

depressions here and there. These cover an acre or two—perhaps more—and are within a stone's throw of the sea, from which they are separated by a ridge of low, hummocky sand-dunes hardly deserving the name of sand-hills. These shut off the highest wave-crests of the sea, which at low water is a good mile away. The usual high-water limit, distinguished by a long thick rim of cockle-shells, numbered by myriads, and empty valves of *Solen ensis*, which I had but a few moments for inspecting, gave promise of many an hour's remunerative overhauling to any one sufficiently interested. And, *mirabile visu!* nest after nest of common terns dotted the inside edge of this ridge of jetsam and flotsam a span or two only from the tide-limit; the spume of the waves must have blown at times upon them. On asking the keeper what about a higher tide than usual, Tom Cringle suggestively shook his head. On referring to the all too meagre report for 1904 of the Wells Wild Bird Protection Society, I find a suggestion of danger: "There were neither heavy gales nor high tides to harm the nests, and by poisoning the rats early in the season the young birds were saved from their depredations."

The larger area referred to is a wide-spreading shingly level, interspersed by patches of sparse verdant dune-herbage. The terns—the common (*Sterna fluviatilis*) and the little (*S. minuta*)—had much to say by way of protest, and flew screaming around—the little "chit-pearl" as vociferous as its larger relative—in excited hundreds, like so many whirling snowflakes, keeping up their objection so long as we kept upon the move. The nests in many places were but a yard apart; a triangular stride would cover three of them. I was struck by the marvellous correspondence in colour of the eggs to their surroundings; those deposited among the rufous-tinted shingle were of a russet colour. The ground here was almost as smooth as if it had been rolled; indeed, the levelled stones gave one the impression of a rude attempt at tessellated pavement. Among the blue-grey patches of pebbles the predominating tints of the eggs were greyish, and on the greener portions they most assimilatively assumed that colouration. In some instances, however, conspicuously contrasted eggs quickly caught the eye. Dr. Long pointed out one egg, on a dark ground, of a vivid bluish-green, and

some nests contained three differently coloured eggs. Every egg was blotched more or less with bluish-ash and dark brown.

The eggs of the common tern were easily distinguished from those of its *confrère* by their larger size. In almost every instance three eggs were laid, and most of them were hard-set. I obtained an addled one of each species, and understood that one clutch of young birds had already forsaken their nest. We looked in vain, however, for any of them in the adjacent marams ; they appear to be as capable of concealment as the little ones of the ringed plover. Extreme vigilance was necessary to avoid trampling on nests, but we soon learned to "spot" them, thanks to Tom Cringle's "trade mark" in the shape of a heel-pushed heap about a foot away from each. With a few exceptions every nest of the common tern was lined with coarse, sixpenny-sized pieces of cockle and oyster shells, those of the little terns being adorned by a handful of finer fragments. There can be no doubt these pieces of shell are collected by the birds instinctively for the sake of their useful retention of heat; they certainly do not add to comfort otherwise. All the eggs were not only warm to the touch, but the lining of shells was distinctly so also. Their ring-plover neighbours used still smaller fragments. A few of the larger terns' nests were lined with dry grass-bents, and formed really comfortable, cosy habitations.

Here and there we came across patches of pebbles running larger, many being of the size of the terns' eggs, others as large as a hen's egg; these seemed to be seldom wetted, even by the sea-spray, and were of a blue-grey colour ; many of them were plentifully spotted with a minute lichen, which I have seen referred to as *Lecanora aspersa*, and also as *Lecidea petræa*,[1] the latter most probably being the correct name. Wherever a trio of eggs had been located amongst these the similitude was remarkable. I took a stone or two home with me, and, placing egg and stones together, made a coloured sketch of them, "just for the novelty" of it. These lichen-spotted stones do not occur at Yarmouth, where all

[1] I forwarded a lichen-covered stone from Aldeburgh to the late H. D. Geldart, who wrote : "I sent one of your stones to London to be named. The spots on it are the *Hypothallus* of *Lecidea petræa*, a tolerably common lichen on pebbles."

the shingle-strips are subject to the laving of the sea-waves; but at Aldeburgh, on the Suffolk coast, under conditions like those obtaining at Wells, I found long stretches of them exactly corresponding in appearance.

We presently hid in the long maram-grass on the higher sand-heaps, when the terns with no more ado simply flew above their nests, and from an elevation of ten or twenty feet alighted right down upon them, their wings closing as their light, buoyant bodies touched their precious eggs. The wind was easterly, and nearly all their agitated manœuvres had been performed with head to it; and they, without exception, sat upon their eggs with the bill pointing eastward. The clamour ceased at once. Just before we sat down on the sand-dune we flushed a red-legged partridge from its nest, the startled bird dashing across the nesting area, whereupon the angry terns darted down upon it, and fairly mobbed it out of sight.

I regret that my time was so limited, for the nesting habits of the terns are exceedingly interesting; and Tom Cringle himself, a characteristic son of the marshes, was "no chick" at bird-lore, nor uninteresting in his conversation. A mighty hunter of wildfowl he may be in the winter months, but a famous and reliable watcher he appears to be in his proper season; and I question whether any of the "egg-poaching" fraternity would profit by trying any of their games upon him. That the very careful protection given the terns at nesting-time is rewarded by good results seems to be an assured fact, and one only regrets that on their passage south in the autumn they should be treated with scant kindliness by irresponsible gunners. It is gratifying, too, to know that at Cley and Blakeney, equally famous nesting-places, similar protection is afforded them; and the report issued by this society is so entertaining that I am constrained to copy a few lines from the watcher's report for 1904:—

"*May 22nd.*—Found lesser and common terns' and dottrells' [ringed plovers'] nests with eggs.

"*May 28th to end of month.*—Plenty of fresh nests.

"*June 12th.*—First clutch of lesser terns and dottrells hatched out.

"*June 13th and 14th.*—First lot of common terns hatched; strong, healthy birds."

The last line of R. Pinchin's report is most satisfactory:—"I am sure there are more tern, sheldrake, etc., come every year."

The report for 1905, for Cley and Blakeney, was equally satisfactory, and as it may be interesting for comparison I take the liberty of adding it. The following are from R. Pinchin's entries:—

"*May 22nd.*—Found several lesser terns, and dottrells' nests with eggs.

"*May 23rd and 24th.*—Found first nest of common tern, and plenty of nests of each sort to end of month.

"*June 7th.*—First clutch of dottrells hatched out.

"*June 10th.*—First clutch of lesser terns.

"*June 11th and 12th.*—Several more hatched out; strong, healthy birds.

"*June 15th.*—First clutch of common tern.

"*June 16th.*—Saw young sheldrakes. There were a good number of nests which hatched out well this season.

"*From June 16th to 21st.*—Terns and dottrells hatching out, and doing extra well; very few young ones have died.

"*June 24th.*—Saw young lesser terns with feathers; would soon be able to fly.

"*June 26th.*—Saw clutch of twelve young sheldrake, and another clutch of six.

"*July 2nd.*—Three young redshanks hatched out of nest of four eggs; one egg bad. These were very late.

"*July 3rd.*—Saw some sandwich terns, but none nested here. Most of the young ones got off very early.

"There were several fresh nests of common terns after July 3rd.

"I poisoned the rats before the birds commenced to nest, but was much troubled with a few stoats during the latter part of the season. However, I succeeded in killing most of them.

"During the winter I saw three Iceland gulls (one old and two young ones), also some little gulls and a Sabine's gull, but nothing else rare.

"R. PINCHIN."

I was fortunate in seeing the report of the Wells Wild Bird Protection Society for 1905, and append the same:—

"TWYFORD HALL, *April 25th*, 1906.

"The watcher, Tom Cringle, informs me that the number of nesting terns increased as usual, especially the lesser terns, of which there were at least sixty pairs.

"There were no high tides during the season. I went round the nests on July 3rd, and found that a great number of the young birds were dying off. I thought that as many as half the hatch were dead or dying. The dead birds had no marks of injury on them, and whether they died from an epidemic or from starvation,[1] I cannot say. There had been no rough weather to prevent the old ones fishing, nor heavy hailstorms, but all that I picked up appeared to have empty crops.

"An increasing number of visitors went round the nests.

"C. A. HAMOND, *Secretary*."

* * * * * *

BREYDON HERONS AT HOME

Nine miles to the south-west of Great Yarmouth, on the north side of the river Yare, lies the large but scattered village of Reedham, so named, it is supposed, from the great quantities of reeds that formerly characterised the adjacent lowlands; and made somewhat important by reason of its being a "junction" on the Great Eastern Railway. It was here, too, that Lodbrog, the Dane, is said to have been slain by the jealous Berne, the Saxon king's huntsman.

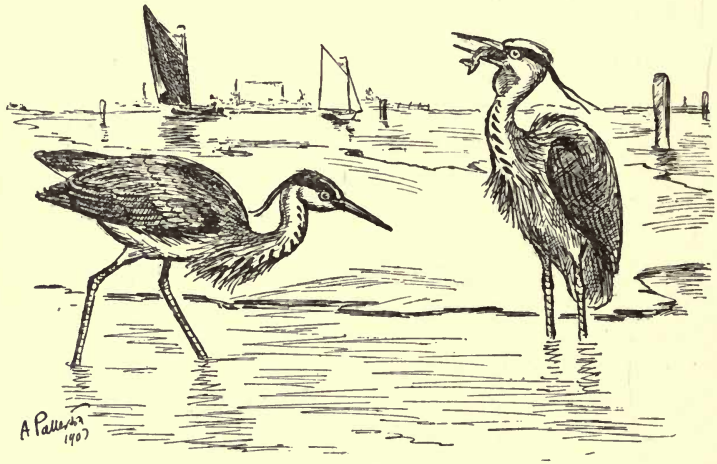
To me the greatest interest attaching to Reedham is the fact that a flourishing colony of herons is established there, and, after a long-determined intention, I at length paid a hurried visit to it on the hot, sultry afternoon of July 15th, 1905. The heronry may be easily seen from the windows of the train, just as it enters the outskirts of the village, although the unsuspecting might pass and repass it many times without a knowledge of its existence. At intervals along the route the lumbering flight of a passing heron may be noticed, or some member of this colony may be seen thigh-deep in a Breydon "run," watching for a lunch of eels; and now and again another, scarce troubling to look at the snorting engine ahead of us, stolidly eyes the ditch he stands in, hoping for the coming of some vole or stickleback, for he knows the monster to be harmless, as far as he is concerned.

The Reedham heronry is situated about a mile from the station, in a wooded "carr," on rising ground where the marshes commence, and it is reached by a roundabout road-

[1] Herring-syle, the chief food of the terns, were remarkably scarce in the summer of 1905.—A.P.

way, made lively for the pedestrian at this season by the flies, which seem to be awaiting his coming in the tall nettles that front the thickset hedges, and where the meadow-brown butterflies start ahead at his shadow.

I was fortunate in finding Mr. Preston, the steward, immediately on entering the farm premises, and was made noisily welcome (?) by a brace of chained dogs. It was but a short ramble from here to the heronry; the harsh cries of some of the birds betokening that several of them were as yet at home. Preston, an intelligent and interesting man, who seemed justly proud of the birds, pointed out, as we



DINNER-TIME. HERONS

strolled along, a turnip-field most woefully suffering from the "canker"; on every leaf, or remnant of it, were numbers of small green larvæ,[1] with curiously pointed posterior, and which skipped about in a most excited manner on a sheet of paper when touched, in that lateral, wriggling fashion assumed by a chopped worm, but infinitely more quickly. I was afterwards informed that my old friends the starlings went after them by thousands, but the pests were so widely distributed in Norfolk that year that irreparable damage was done the farmers. On the field mentioned a hundred and forty herons have at times assembled.

[1] I forwarded several of them to Mr. H. J. Thouless, of Norwich, with whom they pupated; he has since informed me they were the larvæ of a small moth (*Plutella cruciferarum*). It is a very distinctive species.

As one enters the closely packed clump of tall Scotch firs and somewhat attenuated ashes, he is greatly impressed by the luxuriant growth of the reeds and bracken that, often together, crowd beneath them, the fronds of the latter shoulder-high in places; whilst beautiful ferns, tall, vicious nettles, and sprays of red campion abound, and hundreds of red-ripe wild raspberries invite him to pluck and taste them. The height of the trees and their thickly-bushed tops attract attention, as also does one ancient fir, standing in their midst dead and decaying—a barked, scarred, and punctured skeleton. You feel something akin to pity as well as interest in the old thing, which seems ready to totter and fall; but the sturdy survivors, clustering around it, ward off the evil day, and screen it from every wind. In that dead tree more interest seemed centred than in all those living; it had died of sheer old age, and was now a happy hunting-ground of the lesser spotted woodpecker. The droppings of the herons had not killed it, or why had it suffered alone? The thickly growing undergrowth had caught much of the herons' excreta before any of it had touched the earth beneath it and, far from suffering, grew the more rankly for it. There was "an ancient and fish-like smell" in the air that tickled the nostrils somewhat, but not offensively, although the bailiff assured me "there *was* something in it" after a heavy shower of rain.

Kestrels were here in plenty, and the keen-eyed hawks dashed into the open with emphatic and shrilly cries of "*kee, kee, kee!*" at our approach. "You don't kill the kestrels?" I asked of Preston. "No, I do not," he replied; "they are far too useful." A remark that spoke much for his forbearance and common sense.

Wood-pigeons, too, "flip-flapped" away from their slovenly nests, leaving their low-built, loosely-stacked bundles of faggots in hot haste; in one instance I saw the greater part of an egg showing between the foundations.

In a few moments we came under the herons' nests, which needed no pointing out, for such huge constructions, although by no means carelessly built, and with several occasionally adorning a single tree, stood out boldly between my binoculars and the sky; while in the few open spaces between the topmost boughs old birds might be seen wheeling around on light, strong wing, in a manner by no means ungraceful,

and altogether different from that heavy, lumbering flight one notices as fishing birds move from one Breydon "drain" to another, or when they are lazily winging their way over the marsh ditches. The familiar "*frank!*" was repeatedly uttered, and an occasional deeper bass "*trouk!*" betrayed anxiety and a note of warning. Some nest had probably and unwittingly been bereft of a juvenile tenant. Presently we found our surmise correct, for we came across a young heron, full-feathered but unable to fly, who at our approach, scared and excited, played a clumsy game of leap-frog with the bracken he as often blundered through. We let him go; his parents would have found it awkward to drop through the tangled branches to come and console him, but there can be no doubt he will find enough food thrown down to him, perhaps unintentionally, to keep him going until he dares venture out to the neighbouring ditches to hunt for himself.

Only a few young herons remained in their nests; the majority, indeed, sat or stood just outside them. We noted that they were well-feathered, and all but ready to follow their elders to their daily war upon the frogs, voles, and fishes.

But such bundles of faggots were these high-perched nests! Some of them would well-nigh have filled a wheelbarrow. On one large ash tree there must have been over a dozen, and the whole ninety and more of them were so closely built that you might have sat in the central one, and easily have pitched its eggs into the furthermost nest. And this is the heronry, in the very wood wherein, three hundred years ago, Sir Thomas Browne also saw the spoonbills nesting! I felt like taking off my hat, for the place seemed hallowed by associations, and venerable in its history.

The herons are looked for every year, "reg'lar as a clock," on February 1st; their call is heard for the first time, the bailiff assured me, on that date at about eight in the evening; so punctual are they on their return. On April 1st young ones are heard "twipping" in the nests. In early summer the young ones keep much in the vicinity of the wood, using that side most sheltered from the wind. The frogs, water-voles, sticklebacks, and other creatures in the neighbouring moist places then pay heavy toll. At pairing-

time there is much ado in the tree-tops, squabbles being not infrequent; and no wonder, when they begin to set up establishments as close to each other as houses in a Yarmouth "Row." In August they all depart, and find fresh pastures. Some, no doubt, take a trip to the Continent, a procedure as fashionable with birds as with men.

It was made pretty plain, too, where there were nests overhead, by the big area of white-splashed plants below. A score of angry and inebriated whitewashers could not have flung their whitewash half so effectively; it seemed to have rained excreta! And lying around in the less besmeared places, and under the bracken, were many pellets, mostly the size of ducks' eggs. I noticed these in hundreds when brushing aside the herbage in order to discover any fish that might have fallen, but in this search I was not fortunate; though I picked up a three-inch tail-end of an eel, brown, frayed, and evil smelling. It had evidently been thrown up by an overfed or excited youngster. Two of the pellets I took home with me, and pulled to pieces; they smelt like decayed mushrooms. They were hard to disintegrate, being closely matted, and had much the appearance, when torn, of black cotton-wool; I found them composed almost entirely of the fur of the water-vole, with a few broken, brittle teeth and fragments of skulls, that crumbled somewhat easily between the fingers. I warrant that the herons destroy thousands of water-voles in the course of a season. In one pellet I found cream-white maggot-like larvæ, probably of some beetle, and many minute insects, that on white paper, by the aid of a powerful lens, could be distinguished as a microscopic beetle much resembling a *Staphylinid.*

Mr. Preston remarked that the herons did now and again drop small eels, running up to half a pound, and sometimes a few small fresh-water fishes; he had found half a small jack, and a trout weighing at least a pound, but had never discovered a flatfish, which is curious, seeing that in certain seasons when eels are not plentiful, flounders have to satisfy them when fishing on Breydon. I saw early in July six young herons busy on Breydon, capturing little flounders.

For neighbours the herons have the kestrels and wood-pigeons, and this season a pair of carrion crows. These, the

bailiff said, were shy, wary, and silent; they seemed to know they bore the mark of an avine Cain; they allowed of no near approach, but glided out of their nest like black spirits, noiselessly and speedily, and kept away until the coast was clear again. Rooks nested there numerously also, and as many as five hundred young ones were shot each season, while jackdaws too had a few nests in the neighbourhood. Reedham heronry is by no means a lonely spot in birddom.

All the time we were chatting and brushing through the bracken—an hour at least—various species of moths took to wing at our approach; but not so the flies, which buzzed around our heads by hundreds: our hats were like beehives. The prevailing odour must certainly be sweet to them, and no doubt they find the undergrowth a happy hunting-ground. They either welcomed us or protested against our presence—I thought they did a great deal of both—and but for decorating the eaves of my hat with a festoon of brake-leaves, the torture—to me, at any rate—would have been unendurable; my friend seemed on better terms with them. They left us, however, when we came out of the "carr," and in a very short time I left my most communicative friend to hurry to the train, thanking my lucky star that my "name and fame" had preceded me, and had acted as an "open sesame" to the good man's store of heron-lore.

On arrival home I opened Mr. Southwell's dainty volume on *Natural History* by Sir Thomas Browne,[1] and could but help wishing that his remark, "The great number of riuers riuulets and plashes of water makes hernes and herneries to abound in these parts," held good in its entirety to-day. But to see such a goodly heronry as that at Reedham was an experience far from uninteresting; and I endorsed his further remark respecting "yong hensies being esteemed a festiuall dish and much desired by some palates," for I certainly prefer to wild duck the carcase of a juvenile heron that has not yet grown rank by living long enough on a diet of fishes and other flavouring creatures.

[1] *Notes and Letters on the Natural History of Norfolk*, by Sir Thomas Browne, edited by T. Southwell, F.Z.S. Jarrold, 1902.

July, 1895

A NIGHT ON BREYDON MARSHES

The night cloud is edged with gold as the sun sinks slowly out of sight behind it. Streaks of yellow and red with spots of purple freckle and fringe the widespread curtain of the sky. A quietude, restful and almost oppressive, settles over the marshland; it is refreshing after the turmoil and the rumble of the streets in the distant town, now grown grey and indistinct as eventide draws a curtain over its strifes and sorrows. As the daylight wanes the lamps begin to sparkle and gleam; but the darkness seems laggard in its coming to the flat lowland country as imperceptibly night creeps on.

We were interested, when coming upstream, in seeing the petulant redshanks clamorously scolding on the river bank, or darting on pointed wing that showed streaks of glistening white. Something had startled that pair of birds—the rambling of a bullock, perhaps, into dangerous proximity to the nest; or may it not have been merely their evensong? So we thought for a time.

But turning our eye round to see if the coast is clear, as a careful boatman often does, we notice a small object afloat in midstream, and on a second look we see that it is moving. Curiosity prompts a closer inspection, and a few quick strokes bring us to it. The redshanks clangour has, if anything, redoubled, and their excitement too. Stooping, we slip a hand under a tiny bird still covered with a greyish down, and recognise it at once as a baby "redleg." It is a matter of but a few strokes more and our punt glides beside the rond, on which we place the little swimmer, and as soon as we are deemed at safe distance the old birds joyously come to the wee thing's help. Why that small bird got into the middle of the river defies our guessing; it swam with the buoyancy we have also seen in a nestling "pewit" in a precisely similar situation. These "clean-toed" waders swim well. Surely the old birds do not attempt to carry their young as the woodcock sometimes does?

There was a pleasant breeze just before the sun's face turned glowing crimson, and loomed up larger as it neared

the empurpled horizon. The reeds nodded and rustled their speary leaves at us as our boat brushed past them, gliding up the sluice to the *Moorhen's*[1] stern to take up our summer night's lodging. A reed-warbler was singing his loudest ditty in the reed-clump; but his song scarcely rose above the sound of their playful rustling. With the going down of the sun the breeze, too, died away; and then the night-prowlers and the night-flyers took the places vacated by those that love the day. It seemed almost like sacrilege—the harsh

THE SERENADERS. REED-WARBLERS

noises of hewing wood for the cabin fire, and the preparations for a pot of tea. But while the kettle is boiling we sit in the stern-sheets of the *Moorhen*, and look out into the gloaming.

A dark object—some living creature—creeps cautiously out of the reeds, and runs along the muddy margin. There is just sufficient light in the after-glow to show its form distinctly enough; any one "with half an eye" might have known it at once for a water-vole—only the unobservant

[1] In the 90's the *Moorhen* was moored in the "mill-deek" at Mautby, when Banham lived at the Marsh Farm. The "notes" comprising this sketch were made at the time, and will help to convey an idea of the loneliness and isolation of Breydon.

would have called it a water-rat, and been ready in a moment to throw at it a piece of stick or a bit of hardened mud. There are few who do not begrudge a rat its life. Another vole joins it—its mate, no doubt; they are out for a feed and frolic. Deliberately does one pull down a thick succulent grass-blade, nibbling it through at its base, and sitting upon its haunches while working away at it with its yellow incisors —munch! munch! we can hear it quite distinctly—until the last inch disappears between its teeth. Now it wipes its face with its finger-like paws, scratches its left ear with its hind foot, and turns to seize another grass-blade, when up runs its companion and evidently makes some sign, for the two scuttle at once into the safer mazes of the reeds, to peer out again directly, as if half-ashamed of being so nervous.

The swallows, many of which were recently hatched in the crevices and in nests under the beams in the old marsh-mill behind us, have been wheeling round the mill-cap, and dashing in and out of its wicket and window, until quite dusk. Whether they wish to curtail the short summer night's napping, or to snatch up a few moths to vary the day's gleanings among the flies with a change of diet, we cannot say. But by the time the bats are on the wing the last swallow has tucked its bill under its wing-coverts in the quaint, grim edifice, the creaking of whose wooden wheels sometimes makes weird lullaby to bird, and beast, and man within hearing of it.

Little bats and big bats—pipistrelle and noctule—are now dashing hither and thither overhead; there may be even rarer species among them, but so little attention—which, alas! often means *slaughter* as well—is given to the *Cheiroptera*, that the identity of some of them may be left undecided. We cannot mistake the broad-winged noctule, for he is a big fellow, a foot across his membraneous wings; and he looms up larger than he really is, like a bird in a fog. He has a fine set of teeth, as we know by experience, and can use them well; the night-flying beetles and the flittering moths find this out to their cost. Whether the noctule catches the big dor-beetles in the folds of his wing I cannot say—he halts strangely in his flight sometimes, and may do so in order to seize upon the beetle; but we rather think so strong-limbed a creature might do damage to those india-rubber-like wings, which are delicate and sensitive. He is clever,

indeed, if in the dusk he seizes his flying prey between his teeth. Anyway, we can distinctly hear him scrunch up the beetle, hard wing-cases as well, as he loiters a moment or two in his flight. Our hearing is keener than that of many persons, and we can say—what some disbelieve—that we have often heard the quick snap of a swallow's or a house-martin's mandibles closing on a fly as the bird flitted by. As to the number of moths upon the wing, an entomologist might run himself tired in pursuit of the various species. The open doors of the houseboat, with the rays of our lamp shining brightly beyond, attract a number of them, and so many white, grey, brown and variously speckled creatures flutter into the cabin that it has become an insectarium.

Before it was quite so dark as it is just now, we had occasion to push off in the punt to the marshman's house across the river. A distorted willow fronts the house; this was surrounded by quite a host of ghostlike moths, white and as glossy as satin. These a fern-owl shortly after found out—perhaps he knew the spot well—and he flitted around quite merrily, jarring his strange whirling note at intervals every time he alighted upon a broken rail beside the tree, and sat tail up, as if the weight of his supper had spoilt his balance. But this is an odd way Master Goatsucker has of resting.

Who loves the rippling song of the reeds, loves also the brisker notes of the reed-warbler. One at our elbow bursts forth into a spirited roundelay—his one and oft repeated song. The little fellow, not larger than a linnet, and too bashful to force his presence unduly upon our notice, seems to have a heart so full of merriment that he must needs wake up at intervals during the night to give vent to his exuberance of spirits. This song he sang at Whitsuntide, and he has not yet tired of it, nor have we. We never saw such a fellow! The bolting of a water-vole, the whispering of the wind through the reed-bed, the slush of a bream, or the croak of a moorhen will certainly disturb him, but he is never resentful, never sullen; instead, he cheers himself with song, like a true philosopher. So he never seems to make enemies, although some take advantage of him. The other day we saw a reed-warbler chasing a small blue dragon-fly as it skidded past his lair—his home at least, for his nest, suspended on a scaffolding of reed-stems, we found in that reed-

clump. There was a fat young cuckoo in the nest, and the rightful tenants had been shouldered out. We looked for them, but no doubt some water-vole had found them for a tit-bit and had eaten them. How the young usurper resented our interference, snapping viciously at our fingers, and protesting with every lifted feather! We could have wrung his neck for a couple of pins, but that he was now all in all to his foster-parents, the silly dupes! who fed him assiduously, enjoying in their ignorance that protective instinct which passes for good works and parental care, though they must at times have thought their baby an ugly prodigy, and sighed over the labour he gave them. Their misplaced love kept them busy enough, searching for aphis, slug, and spider, and hunting for many a caterpillar. . . .

It is now midnight. Everything around has blended into indistinctness save for the dusky outline of solid things—the distant trees, the mill behind us and the bank-top that ends in darkness. A few stars twinkle overhead and are reflected in the ditch we are moored in, making the shallow "cut" appear unfathomable. Moths still flutter in the glowing light that escapes through the houseboat's open door, dancing in gaily only to burn their "toes," and scare themselves around the lamp-glass. And tiny "gnats" or mosquitoes, with screamy buzz, trip in eccentric flight under the cabin roof, now and again coming to grief against the hot lamp-glass.

Many of the noises—the low of a sleepy bullock, the croak of marsh-bird, and the hum of droning beetle—have all but ceased. A few nocturnal species are still a-foot and a-wing, but they are silent as behoves those who prowl when others sleep. Once we hear the scuffle of a rat with his fellow—the manners of *Mus decumanus* are very apparent; there was a fight for the possession of a stranded roach at the sluice end. We note the quack of a passing fowl, and the wail of a wandering curlew. We hear, too, a strange medley of gull cries borne over the marshes from Breydon; something has disturbed their slumbers on the flat. These nocturnal calls and pipings are by no means unpleasant, for they add a fitting weirdness to the night.

The pleasantest of all the night-cries is that of the lapwing. Two of them are nesting on a marsh hard by; one is

at present on its nest; her companion, with others off duty in the locality, are worming in a likely corner of the marsh adjoining. Master Hornpie knows well that the worms like the cool evening, and worms are his favourite dainties. He knows of their presence by the feel of them, as in his runnings to and fro their cold bodies touch his sensitive toes. The worm is quick to bolt indoors, but the lapwing is quicker, and seizing it by the head, hangs tightly but tenderly to it, and at length persuades it to come up and be devoured. We are of opinion, too, that those great beady eyes have a barn-owl's fitness for seeing in the dark. But for these occasional sounds of nature the moments flit by in silence. We fain would have them linger, as Wordsworth seemed to desire when writing:—

> "Summer ebbs—each day that follows
> Is a reflex from on high,
> Tending to the darksome hollows
> Where the frosts of winter lie."

There is no mist on the marshes to-night, or we had turned in earlier. The first hour of a new day finds us still keeping vigil. We have just refreshed our lower nature with steaming coffee, and ransacked our locker for a dainty hidden there. The changes which usher in the daylight are worth the watching. The gradual lightening of the eastern sky from deepest blue to palest green, the dimming of the stars, the streaks of gold and rosy tints lighting up the horizon, the dots of purple, and the answering tints abovehead, and now to the westward, change, and pale, and brighten, giving place to other tints and colours in panoramic succession. The sun is throwing up bright, sharp rays to herald his coming before we have rolled ourselves up in our blankets and thrown ourselves upon the settles to snatch a brief period of repose.

All is a blank until we hear the sharp rattle of the marshman's stick upon the side of our cabin. He has crossed the river in order to complete his rounds. Morning and night he patrols his widespread domains to see if the cattle and horses are safe and sound. Now and again he finds one flank-deep in a "deek," and on several occasions we have helped him, with tackle and block, to pull out some half-

drowned creature,[1] and gathered some of his mushrooms for our trouble. He tramps a score miles each day, and often thirty. We answer his knock, but grunt for a respite, and slumber a full hour longer. When we turn out for a refreshing bath the sun is well up in the heavens; the meadow-brown butterflies and the swallows, and a hundred other creatures, are on the wing. Two or three white-sailed yachts have already passed upstream; the low banks hide their hulls, and they seem to be ploughing through the marshes, so serpentine is the course of the Bure. Brown-sailed wherries are careering along before a gentle breeze, and the merry "Good mornin', guv'nor!" from a red-capped wherryman is the first salute we receive. The footprints of a heron in the mud astern of us tell of the strange company we have had since nightfall; maybe he had one of the voles for breakfast this morning. Half an hour later, our breakfast over, you would have found us trudging merrily along the New Road. In forty minutes we had left Mautby Mill four miles behind us, by river distance; and at nine o'clock we timed our watch by the Town Hall clock.

[1] In all weathers and seasons, save in the depth of winter, these walks round have to be undertaken. On one occasion a bull had blundered into a deep ditch, and required the whole of the available men in the neighbourhood to pull him out, whereon he charged all and sundry, and a hasty flight was expedient. *This was gratitude!*

CHAPTER VI

BREYDON IN LEISURELY AUTUMN

ON HOUSEBOATS

WITH the advent of August summer may be said to have rounded the corner; the days may be warmer, but there is a perceptible shortening of the daylight, while an appearance of ripeness creeps over the face of nature. One feels, perhaps, more leisurely in August than in any other month of the year, for there come the welcome holidays, with a sense of restfulness and relaxation. Far and wide scatter the holiday-making crowds, and I, now that my summer holidays have come, make for—Breydon. It is not every one who could remain for a month content with so muddy and level and solitary a holiday resort, but all tastes are not alike; and having spent the summer in the slums of a big seaport town, one can well appreciate a spell of rough-and-tumble life, free and unrestrained, getting up when one chooses, doing just what one fancies, and leading the simple life, free of life's nastinesses, of neighbours, newspapers, and noises.

Much of our pleasure in life is anticipatory; the preparations for a holiday are cheerfully undertaken, and are a kind of forestallment of its enjoyments. And who can gauge the pleasures enjoyed by a boating man who scrapes and paints and rigs and overhauls his stores before he goes afloat? But long before August comes the old *Moorhen* has put on her annual rig-out; cushions, blankets, and household gear and sundries have been reinstalled, and nights not a few have already been spent therein. There has, however, been the inevitable rush back in the early morning.

The *Moorhen* lies near Banham's farm, two good miles from the town, shored up, like a hull still on the stocks, on a little rond boarded round by timbers, to arrest the constant

licking away of the margins by moving waters and lapping waves. When tides are low one can wander up by walls or marshes; for when the creeks are empty even a punt must remain stranded. When one would get back by boat, care must be taken to watch the tides, or to leave the punt moored half a mile down the walls in a drain that is empty only at low water. The watcher afloat yonder across the flats in his "Noah's Ark" has water always under him.

Breydon houseboats differ little externally, and are simply huts with nearly flat roofs, or are built span-roof fashion, on a condemned, but not necessarily worn-out smack's boat. Only in internal arrangements do they differ. An eel-babber's or a smelter's hut may be left "in the rough," or if he seeks greater comfort, it may be matchboarded inside and varnished or painted, as it pleases him. Stoves to warm the cabins differ as greatly as those who cook their pans of frying eels upon them. Lockers usually fill up the ends, fore and aft; the settles serve as cupboards below, in which coal, water-bottles, and a score other cumbersome necessaries are stowed. The *Moorhen* boasts a mantelpiece and one or two other decorations of an artistic character. The Breydoner bundles in his houseboat nets and much of his gear, and he sleeps soundly upon a sack thrown over the nets and corks, with another, or a blanket, flung over himself. Outside float his eel-trunks, and on the roof you will find his poles, picks, and sails. He is a Robinson Crusoe afloat. Houseboats vary in value, from the tarry veteran at fifty shillings to the more elaborate amateur punt-gunner's roomy ark worth as many pounds. Luxury and utility, sometimes combined, are viewed from different standpoints afloat as well as on shore.

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IN THE HOUSEBOAT

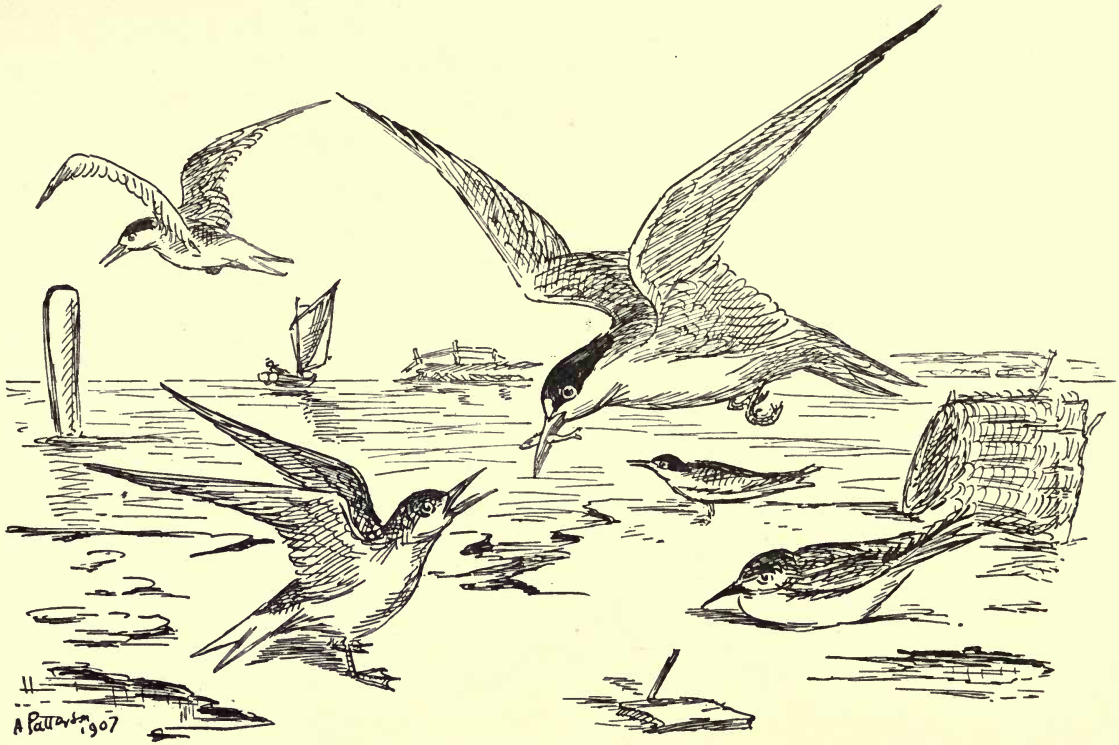
The first Monday evening in August finds our punt well laden with some of the necessaries of life — bread, tea, potatoes, and what not—every parcel snugly stowed away in the side-lockers or under the forepeak. A steady south-easterly wind with a flowing tide are in our favour, and as we are in no great hurry I have taken in a reef of the old brown-tanned sail, so that you will have plenty of headroom, and

can see whatever birds may be bustling around, making sure of a supper, of some sort, before the sun sets. These south-easterly winds, so common off this coast in the warmer evenings, are most convenient for our upgoing, and nine times out of ten we can reckon on a shift to the north'ard and west'ard by sunrise, sufficient to waft us home, either on the ebb or the flood tide. I need not explain the processes of Nature which so oblige us.

The sun has been glaringly hot to-day, and the heated air quivers over the warm flats. Here and there distant objects appear inverted; the far-off mills loom up big, and stand out of the mist, gleaming and weird. Some herons yonder on the Duffell's flats show up distinctly and much magnified, while several black-backed gulls look as large as bustards, and when they are moving one might almost mistake them, at first glance, for a company of black-coated boys manœuvring.

It is a wonderful sight, this Breydon mirage! Even the bullocks on the walls are distorted, and appear to be standing on stilts, while the trees beyond Breydon and the stakes in the channel look ghostly and uncanny. It is the density of the different strata of air, affected by the hot mud and cooler waters of the estuary, which gives these mingled effects of refraction and reflection. It is a far more interesting phenomenon than the marsh mists which often hover above the lowlands at sunset, blotting out all the view beyond the nearest marshes on either side. This all-pervading layer of mist sometimes hovers a foot or two above the grass, and only the legs of grazing cattle are visible; then, while one stands marvelling, it drops nearer the ground, hiding all but their heads and backs. A misty night prophesies a fine morning, and a dry cabin-top after nightfall is often the sign of a wet to-morrow. We passed a lot of gulls squabbling over a couple of stale loaves that had been heaved overboard by some indignant yachtsman.

On the edge of the "Ship" drain a parcel of little terns sit bunched up, head to wind, resting after the day's fishing. One little fellow finds the "whitebait" flashing in the clear water most alluring; he hovers questioningly around the punt as we mimic his bat-like squeal. How keenly the small thing eyes every movement of the tiny fishes in the water below, which flash like strips of gold in sunlight as they play



FAMILY CARES. LITTLE TERNS

near the surface. It is odd to see the sharp underturn of the bird's head when it catches sight of a likely victim, dropping backwards in its flight and suddenly, "like a bolt from the blue," dashing obliquely at it and seizing it with unerring aim.

A youngster on the flat has been watching its mother fishing, and lifts itself, all a-flutter and vociferous as any young starling, to receive the fish which is presently most adroitly dropped between its mandibles.

I never tire of watching these delightful creatures, old and young, fishing and begging, toying and toiling. This high and often dry flat at the left of the entrance to the "Ship" drain is a favourite resort of the various terns, the little terns in particular, which in spring make it a kind of half-way house, and in the early autumn a sort of nursery for their youngsters. I have spent an hour at a time near this flat watching them, and wondering how each bird knows its own among the ten or twenty squealing chicks, sitting in a line, about a yard apart. It is curious how a mother tern will pass three, four, or five, and stop at the sixth, delivering to it a portion of its dinner—a nice, fresh young herring. Another flits by to the twelfth, and scarcely does one little one of all the first eleven raise more than a bill to greet the passer-by, but the twelfth bird is all a-flutter and a-fuss to welcome it. Mutual recognition seems a certainty. I noticed that the elder bird always "cheeped" as it neared its own offspring, and sometimes dropped the fish beside it, as if to tempt the little thing to learn to help itself. The number of terns visiting Breydon in August is largely influenced by the abundance or scarcity of herring-syle.

A few small waders are passed, chiefly young dunlins and redshanks, tame as house-sparrows, for they have not yet learnt that man is a butcher. The young dunlins are indifferently marked, hardly so drab as they will be in mid-winter; while an adult bird or two, solitary in habit, and just now freed from the cares of domesticity, still retain the livelier hues of springtime, the black horseshoe patch being as well-defined as ever. The saddle-backed and the common gulls are as tame as pheasants, seemingly knowing that harm would not come to them in the sunnier days, while of the black-heads, the old are fast losing their hoods and the

young are blotched with rich brown patches. I think the juvenile stage of *Larus ridibundus* is far prettier than the more decidedly handsome dress of summer and equally clean trim attire of early winter. Its flesh-coloured extremities are wonderfully in keeping with its pretty plumage.

I dislike to hear this species called the "Kitty." I'd sooner hear it called the "Scoulton Puit." The true kittiwake, whose legs are black, very rarely visits Breydon. Only once in my experience have I got close to one, a wounded example, sitting on the apex of the wall, having no doubt flown in from sea. Mr. Dye, some fifteen years ago, shot an adult kittiwake here in November.

On reaching the *Moorhen* we at once turn in to light a fire and get tea ready. This task falls to the skipper, and any one who has joined as crew is at liberty meanwhile to have a good look round from the staging, to watch the passing up and down of yachts and wherries in the channel, or to overlook the scattered birds at their ablutions or gleaning up their suppers.

There remains yet a small bare patch of weed-covered flat in front of us. In an hour it will be under water. A few redshanks and a greenshank or two are restlessly picking at the margin of the encroaching tide, while a few juvenile starlings, whose yellow-billed parents brought them shrimps and "sea lice" from the shrimpers' nets drying at the mastheads in the spring, now glean up crustaceans for themselves among the stranded "raw" and "grass." Early training governs even our appetites!

Gossip and tea occupy some time, and it is sundown ere we notice how the time has flown, and dusk before we have cleared away and ceased yarning. Nature lovers find much in common to discourse on, and just as we have stowed away to enjoy an hour's observation outside, in comes Banham, the marshman, with a cheery "Good evenin', gentlemen," for the pipe of good fellowship and a "mardle"; for those who dwell in solitary places are always glad enough to see strange faces, and to converse on what is happening in the big town yonder, so near and yet so far. Banham has just finished milking, and is weary with a hard day's marsh mowing. His stay is short, for every fine day must be made the most of, and he must needs be early abroad in the morning.

The Banhams have dwelt in marshland for generations. The blood of the Vikings courses through their veins, and they still retain the fair hair and bright blue eyes of their race. And what is more, for ages these Banhams have fought flood and tide, and kept the banks and dykes in repair, while Jim Banham is to-day the best mound-builder in East Anglia. The wall running along behind the *Moorhen*, and away to Dan Banham's mill out to the west'ard, was "hained" and strengthened three or four years ago. It will need little repairing in his lifetime.

"Good night, Pattson!" is Banham's last remark as he overtops the walls.

"Good night, Banham!" comes from the houseboat like an echo. . . .

Night has quietly put the day to rest, and the Queen of Night, high over the town, is reflected in a silvery ripple on the flowing waters. The lights of Yarmouth twinkle brightly against the dark and undefinable background; away on our right the dark tide, lapping the rond, distinctly outlines it with glowing phosphorescence; there is a ripple of it yonder, where the water curls round a stranded swill, and Breydon shimmers with weird, mysterious lights. The sky is cloudless, but we can feel the gentle breeze springing up from the west.

Nature is seldom really quiet. Even to-night the gulls are holding a strange concert on the distant "lumps," and odd laughing cries ring out from the common babble. Redshanks are piping on the marshes, and the wail of a passing flock of lapwings bespeaks a changing for fresh feeding grounds. Now and again one hears the deep whistle of the curlew and the harsh croak of the heron.

Even in the waters below life is yet restless; one hears the jump of a mullet, the strange plunging "sluss" of shrimp-hunting eels in the shallows, and the "slap" of a flounder following its prey to the surface. . . .

Little by little these sounds die away, while the lights of Yarmouth go out one by one. The cabin roof is beginning to run with dew. Time to put that pipe away! Let's turn in, lower the lamp, and roll up in our blankets until morning. "*Good night!*"

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ON THE MUDS

We are up betimes in the morning. A loud report, followed by a sharp crack, makes both of us to start up hurriedly from our "bunks" and peer out into the bright morning. Fred Clarke, the puntsman, whose houseboat lies out there to the west'ard, has risen betimes and had a shot or two at some young mallard taking their first look at Breydon. Yesterday they bade good-bye to their elders and started out on their travels, satisfied that the outside world was larger than their native Broads. In one of their more airy flights they caught a bird's-eye glimpse of Breydon, little knowing that among the creeks of that tempting hunting-ground there lurked deadly peril. Out of that little family party three have ended their short lives: two fell to the deadly swivel-gun, and another wounded; that second report plainly told us that the cripple had also been brought to bag. The season for duck-shooting here commences on August 1st; but the redshanks and stray spoonbills and other waders may consider themselves safe, under ordinary conditions, for a full month longer. Then all owners of guns, swivel or otherwise, make common cause against everything that flies.

It was high water last night at ten; to-day it will run up until nearly eleven. Fred Clarke has just retrieved his duck in Duffell's drain yonder, and is making back for his station. All the flats are yet uncovered, and the greater black-backed gulls are prowling everywhere in search of stranded fish or shore-crab, while the black-heads are also bent on gleaning up a breakfast. Just now there are myriads of shore-crabs on Breydon, less in size than a halfpenny. Among the debris at the edge of the wall you will notice hundreds of empty carapaces: pick up half a dozen, and you find the skeleton of *Carcinus mœnas* complete in carapace, legs, antennæ, and eye-stalks. The little fellows have just moulted. Some of the carapaces have been cast off a day or two, and already they have become bleached and brittle, and will crumble up into chalky powder between your fingers. One seldom comes across the crabs in their "soft" condition. I believe they hide in holes in the ronds, under

the *Zostera* and in interstices in the walls, until their new and larger jackets have hardened, a process very soon completed.

Curlew and gull, eel and blenny eagerly pursue these small crabs and find them nutritious food; in maw and stomach the shelly armour soon dissolves to a gelatinous mass, and there is an end of "crabbie." That line of empty "shells" certainly looks odd against the deep green of the wall-grasses, just as if some one had used a huge lump of soft chalk, and drawn the line on purpose.

These old flats fairly teem with life. It will be interesting to stroll a little way barefoot; we shall take no harm, for even on Rotten Eye, where fifty years ago no one dared to walk for fear of sinking thigh-deep, and where in the 80's I used to walk "gingerly" with an oar for company, one can now strut only ankle-deep. There are soft places at the edge of the channel yonder that to this day are, to me, an abomination. Walking on the prostrate *Zostera* is as safe and easy as walking on the marshes. Nature here works slowly sometimes. Here are the footprints, still distinct, of Banham's boy, who came here "winkling" two or three days ago; and here are quant-holes I made in shoving across at high water the following day. Yet it is astonishing how in a few days small creeks will get scoured deeply, and in corners affected by eddies the mud will silt up an inch in a week.

One needs no mud-pattens, although there are places where broken bottles and ragged timber may do mischief. You can never walk barefoot here but the fear of mishap is ever present. The punters never foot the mudflats without having good sea-boots on, nor do the smelters.

Here and there we notice the jets squirted up by clams and shellfish; shrimps and little and yellow gobies scatter and scuttle about in the "lows," and occasionally in a deeper puddle the unmistakable scurry of a little eel, or the dash of a young flounder, attracts attention. The soft mud is riddled with countless holes; the smaller ones were "pricked" by mudworms. I push down my bared arm some seven or eight inches, quickly too, and my fingers come in contact with a hard substance, which by a curling of my finger I at once decide to be a clam. Out it comes! What a state my arm is in—black and muddy! At the nearest puddle I wash it—

clam as well. The bluish shell is by no means pretty; and opening it with my knife I find inside an obese mollusc, like a giant cockle, which looks by no means tempting. No one eats clams from a mudflat!

All over the *Zostera*, lying prone on the mud, great green-shelled winkles are crawling. We soon fill a can with these herbivorous molluscs. You may like the tough morsels, which are sweet enough when washed and boiled. They are the only "shellfish" found on Breydon which are fit for food. Among them crawl myriads of tiny *Hydrobia*. Many shore-birds gather these small molluscs; even town pigeons come to fill their crops with them. Mussels lie here and there in small patches, begrimed and muddy, and eaten only by the hooded crow, who breaks their shells on the flint walls by dropping them from a height. He then scoops out the soft, luscious body and eagerly devours it, fearless of typhoid, a complaint more than incidental to featherless bipeds who break a by-law in order to devour the foul things. It is a great pity that sewage should be allowed to poison what might otherwise be wholesome food for the poor.

Then there are several species of sessile-eyed crustaceans, left by the tide, to be found among the "raw"—*Idotea*, *Gammaridæ*, *Corophidæ* and *Sphæroma*. Notwithstanding these formidable names, the small waders pick them up promiscuously in their travels, and come increasingly as the month wears on.

Let us go back to the houseboat. There is a big, clear puddle near our little jetty, in which we may wash the mud from our feet; and there is clean water in one of the big stone bottles for a rinse. A bath is out of the question to-day; indeed, Breydon is seldom fit for that, save on an easterly wind, when the water is "sheer," and then only from a boat in mid-channel. There is a queer yarn told of a London visitor, who dived in from the balks near the margin at the entrance of Breydon. He could not see bottom, for the westerly wind had troubled the waters. He was found at low tide with his legs in the air, and his head and shoulders fast in the mud! This is a Breydon story I give with all reserve.

A short stroll across the marshes behind us results in our finding enough mushrooms to fry with our steak, and a right

royal breakfast do we afterwards enjoy. When the tide makes a bit more we will shove off, and quant up the cross-drain to Jary the watcher's boat. Perhaps he will be going up the Duffell's drain to the "Fleet" for a little eel-picking; if so, we will join him.

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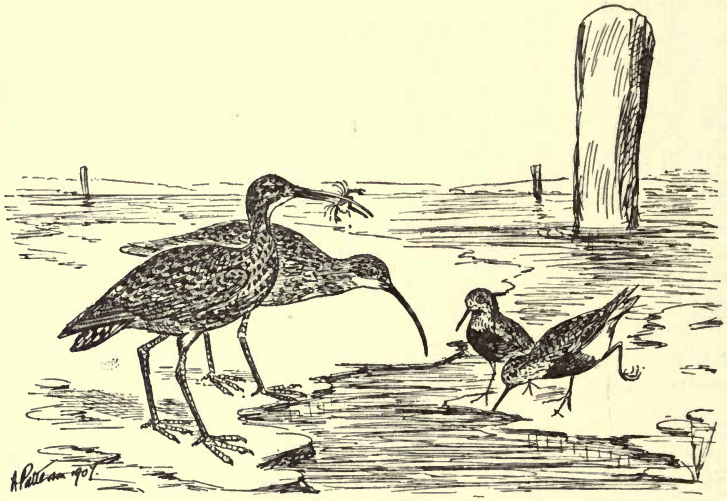
A QUIET SUNDAY

August 6th, 1905.—The spell of a quiet Sabbath evening is upon me. The faint clamour of the church bells to the eastward has died away, and the evening service has begun. The tide is out, and as I sit in the "well" of the old house-boat *Moorhen*, a wide area of mudflats, bare of water save in the shallowest of pools, in which the dunlins can run thigh-deep, lies spread before me right away to the long monotonous bank of houses that, broken here and there by a steeple or a tall chimney, represents the town of Yarmouth, whose only appearance of life, although teeming with people, is exhibited in the smoke of an ice-factory, and the whiter output of a distant locomotive. The flats, richly coloured with the varying greens and browns of the prostrate "wigeon-grass," the "raw" (*Chætomorpha linum*), and the "cabbage" (*Ulva lactuca*), remind one somewhat of an inundated hay-field. An hour hence distant lights will twinkle in the gloaming, and the glare of a holiday resort will make one thankful that there is one little isolated freehold conveniently far away from it, where restfulness and quietude are assured—where only the tremulous notes of the whimbrel and the mellow cry of the curlew break the stillness. In the middle distance runs a silvery liquid thread; it is the "channel," along which glide two or three white-sailed yachts, and an occasional wherry, the skipper of the latter, in these hard times, gladly enough throwing in a seventh day's passage to make up for a poor six days' earnings. Such is Breydon, a salt-water broad so often described, and yet always so fascinating—at least to me. . . .

7 *p.m.*—At this moment there are a few blotches of cloud overhead, yellowing, reddening, purpling as they glide downward to the eastern horizon; and below the setting sun stretch wave-like fringes of clouds, fantastically gilded and

deepening into furnace-red as he sinks behind each ridge. The only birds on the wing are a few late-flying, family-bored sand-martins, and a restless gull or two; while the only cries heard at this moment are the laughing "*yah-yahs*" of a black-headed gull, the "*tweety-teet-teet*" of a couple of common sandpipers, the petulant "*lou-eet*" of a ringed plover, and the calls of a flock of lapwings on the marsh behind. Some of these "peweets" have used the mudflats to-day, a rather unusual proceeding with them.

I have just cleared away the teapot, the remnants of a loaf,



CURLEWS AND DUNLINS

and all that is left of a cream-cheese sent as a "tit-bit" by Mrs. Banham, the marshman's kindly wife who, herself content perhaps with the loneliness of life on the marshlands, half pities the hermit who seeks even lonelier quarters from choice. A lump of steam-coal is glowing in the cabin stove.

What a delightful and characteristic cry of the oozy wilderness is that of the curlew! One yonder is probing and picking among the "grass"; a small crab, a mudworm, an *Idotea linearis*, or a shrimp in an adjoining puddle, all alike are fish in his net. I saw one fellow this morning toying with a flounder he had whipped up at the end of his sickle-bill. It travelled no higher up it; he twisted and turned it round and round, flung it on the wrack, picked it up again, shook

it, all the while knowing he could not hope to swallow it, nor did he try to; then he threw it away in disgust. Why is it the curlew can never pass by a "butt"? The moment after he had thrown it down he ran to a worm-bore, and dragged out a rag-worm. See! how the fellow jumped! He had disturbed a clam in passing that ejected a small jet of water as it sank to safer hiding. I can never help being amused at the curlew's nervousness.

Hearken! how's that for a concert? Twenty-two freshly arrived curlews, all calling at once, now fly "upwards," coming in from seawards—upwards, i.e. towards the Burgh end of Breydon. They may rest awhile there on the flats, but more probably they mean to keep on. They are hard to count until they obliquely open out a couple of furlongs away, and thus make the counting of them easier through this powerful old marine telescope. Handy old instrument! How many spoonbills have I not watched through your lenses! That odd curlew piped as his relatives went by, but remained. He means, no doubt, to stay a few days longer. . . .

7.30.—The sun has dropped behind a purple cloud-bank; his glories are reflected upon a shoal of cloud-specks, reminding us of a flock of gilded sheep. The young crescent moon is high up in the heavens, and travelling along a wind-promising sky, that did not belie our forecast for the morrow. As we close the cabin doors several curlews are excitedly "*koi-koi*"-ing overhead; they have been scared by a distant gun. A marsh-prowler had probably fallen in with some young mallard. The watcher yonder, undoubtedly fuming in his houseboat, thinks differently. He cannot be in two places at once, and most probably he is wondering whether that lot of curlews "up'ard" had lost any of its members. Redshanks are piping on a flat, making a late supper, probably of marine *Gammaridæ*, mixing with them, as likely as not, a few small *Hydrobidæ* that hide under the prostrate "wigeon-grass," and long for the rising waters. The clear double "*pleu, pleu*" of a greenshank away to the right is answered by one out there on the left. How loudly they pipe out their distinct and metallic call-notes! But those curlews! they cannot forget it. We can hear them long after the doors are closed, and the clamour calls vividly to

mind how as a boy I used, on drizzly nights during the autumnal migration, to slip out into the backyard at home and listen eagerly to the bewildered "sickle-bills" flying above the glare of the town lights, charmed and thrilled, too, by the key-whistled sort of note the dunlins blew; and when the knot and the godwit, and now and again an unknown bird, joined in the chorus—that made some of the townsfolk shake their heads, and think of the spirits of the night. . . .

Feeling considerably "run down," on the afternoon of August 5th I provisioned my punt, and started from Breydon Bridge to spend the Sunday and a night or two on my favourite Breydon. I was unable to catch the flood tide, and the wind was dead against me. I pass over the mishap or two that befell me; I had a terribly hard pull against that raging ebb, that blistered even my horny hands, and it took two hours to accomplish a trip that I can generally sail in twenty minutes. I tumbled into the houseboat, and very soon had a rasher of bacon frizzling over the cabin fire, to the wonderment, perhaps, of a couple of black-backed gulls to leeward, who found it difficult to associate such a savoury aroma with their favourite carrion. The only unusual "callers" were the lapwings, which this August, for some reason or other, have haunted the adjoining marsh at night. It cannot be worms—it must be "leather jackets" they are seeking, for they are not particular birds so long as plenty offers; and the larvæ of the *Tipula* are dainties Master Hornpie delights to eat. . . .

Last night I slept well. The first visitor of the morning was a pipit. How the pipits and wagtails of the year like to hear the patter of their little feet on my white-topped cabin roof! I can assure them they are always welcome.

On opening the doors—quietly and slowly, as I always do, for one never knows what company one may have in front of him—I discovered scores of common gulls (*Larus canus*) and black-headed gulls. These were running about the flats, some but a stone's throw away. All were worming, and snatching up shrimps and gobies, and no one knows what else, for many young fishes are stranded when the tide falls; not that it matters much to the little "eel-pouts" [viviparous blennies], flounders, gobies, shore-crabs, and various other crustacea, for some will wriggle into the ooze, or hide be-

neath the *Zostera*, and comfortably await its return. Not so well off are the "whitebait" [tiny herrings] and the juvenile smelts, for after a short, helpless wriggle, unless there happens to remain an inch-deep pool to hold them, they must succumb. No wonder the smaller gulls are most industrious ramblers on the flats, and small wonder they are always so merry!

Half a mile beyond this scattered flock were a number of fine old greater saddle-backed gulls, evidently unencumbered this year by domestic duties, for they had been here all the summer; with them were some younger blotched and speckled birds. They were all busily turning over the wrack in search of shore-crabs, and such chance fishes as they might uncover. You can always tell when they are successful in their search, for a quick grab is followed by an uplifting of the head, and a tangle of weeds depends; in the bight of them some crab or flounder is held fast by the strong bill. A jerk or two and the crab is flung clear and as quickly snatched up again, to be crushed and swallowed with a self-satisfied shake of the head. I have examined the excreta of these gulls; they usually sleep on the "lumps" at regular intervals, and leave them besmeared as with lime. In these white patches are small fragments of half-digested claws and carapaces. Here and there a big gull had, after repletion, dropped down for a nap, waking for a moment now and again to readjust some refractory feather, or to stretch a wing. I had a strong suspicion that some sharp-biting parasite had disturbed its nap.

A shoveler-duck now flew past those saddle-backs, and dropped into a drain. That bird was shot before the day was out by a gunner higher up. At the same moment a cormorant, a far from common visitor to-day, was pottering about in Duffell's drain; he was after a flounder or two for breakfast. The gulls usually resent a cormorant's intrusion, but that day, for some reason best known to themselves, they did not.

Seventy whimbrel, crying as they flew, passed by, and after a few evolutions up and down kept on, and only odd birds frequented the place all day. These came in from the north-east; mayhap they were high in the air, but these wide-spreading flats so attract passing migrants that if they

do not intend to stay they seem compelled to drop within hail of their fellows; then away they go. It was not until the third attempt, and when they opened fan-like, that I could accurately count them. So large a bunch in August was rather uncommon. We see more of them here in May.

Dunlins in small flocks, with which were associating a few ringed plovers and two or three curlew-sandpipers, fussed around, changing their feeding-grounds. Some of the dunlins still retained much of the garb of summer, but they were mostly birds of the year. A little way off were a few redshanks, a solitary grey plover, and a greenshank sticking his stiff bill under the wrack, "job-jobbing" at the *Gammaridæ*, that scuttled away with almost the alacrity of sand-hoppers.

There was a stranger about that day; I could not for the life of me make out what bird it was that produced that queer cry. The note was easily distinguishable, whether uttered alone or in chorus with other birds. What to liken it to I am at a loss to suggest. It is high-pitched; it is too loud for a Temminck's stint; it is not musical like a plover's; it is a triplicate note after the style of a greenshank's; but differs from all I know. I heard it in those dark nights of boyhood—rarely, I will admit—but the note always troubled me, as it does to-day. I would give anything to know its author, but then the novelty would be gone. There it was again! I scanned every bird within range, but to no purpose. I was just as puzzled for a long time by a bullfinch that whistled in hiding; the charm was gone when I detected the fellow.[1]

A black-headed gull had discovered a finger-thick eel. How the fish, seemingly knowing its danger, wriggled! How the bird, unmistakably excited, shook and pinched and ran about with it! It was not many moments ere another blackhead espied it, and gave chase. I followed the twain with my telescope, and they alighted and squabbled at the rond-edge near "Stone Corner." Flying, pursuing, shaking, dodging, the two birds settled again, and the original possessor still held its own. Now he had half-swallowed it, when the

[1] I have since been inclined to think this bird was a godwit: as I have observed (as in the case of the curlew), that birds vary their cries under certain conditions, and I can quite believe this cry to be the *migration note used by solitary birds* of this species.

eel flung its tail round the red upper mandible and tightly twisted itself, to the discomfort and annoyance of the bird, which ran about trying to shake off the coil. Down dropped the eel—he had it again. The eel was becoming weaker, but still struggled when the gull by a great effort swallowed it. But out popped the eel's tail again, and the bird had to vomit the rest of it. The eel was not smitten with its experience, and again protested vigorously against a renewal of it. The gull swallowed it again, and once more ejected it; but on the third attempt, made desperate by another gull coming up to investigate, the catcher got it down, and, by holding his head high and straightening his neck, succeeded finally in imprisoning it. The swellings and writhings in the bird's neck, visible even to myself, could not have been comfortable to him; but I will vow that was not the first eel he had tackled. At last the eel must have succumbed, for the gull, assuming his ordinary freeness of deportment, walked deliberately to a puddle and sipped with ease.

The prettiest birds upon the wing were the little terns. There were several about, both old and very immature young. Hither and thither, mostly with heads to wind, they flew, with bills pointed vertically downward, ready the moment those keen eyes detected a little herring dashing about below to fall upon it, seldom to miss their aim; and when any small fry had been secured, away they went to the edge of a flat, where the youngsters, with the up-winged fussiness of pigeon squabs, snatched at and caught the fish as it dropped from the parental bill. The light, airy-winged creatures were beautiful to look at, and one was glad the month's extension of close time (to all save ducks) gave the fairy-like tern a chance of passing south before the indiscriminating gunner had the opportunity to destroy such feathered gems.

There were wonderfully few herons about that day. Two only were within view—one a bird of the year, the other, I should say, a "three-year-old." The latter I saw strike an eel in the "run" he was standing knee-deep in. The eel weighed, I should say, at least half a pound and, tightly gripping the lively fish, the heron walked deliberately out on to the flat. For fully ten minutes the bird played with it—played, I say—but there was no doubt, in letting the

eel fall upon the "grass," in which it vainly tried to squirm, he was only endeavouring to get a better grip, and at each strike he pinched peevishly; a dozen times at least did the heron drop that eel, and as many times did he seize it again; now and then some filaments of weed blew, pennant-like, from his bill. I have seen a heron thus engaged bullied and pursued by three or four less fortunate fellows finally to lose it, having dropped its prey on the mud below, where it has promptly buried itself in the ooze, to the annoyance of all, and the great chagrin of one. My friend yonder had no rivals, and at length, having knocked all resistance out of his prey, he bolted it, taking a sip in the same way the gull had done; and having in all likelihood slightly "overloaded his stomach"—for he had been fishing for half an hour—he drew his head into his shoulders, lifted one leg, and took a nap. The rising tide came well up his odd leg ere he awoke to resume his fishing. . . .

It was dinner-time, and the tide was at the full. The redshanks, washed off the opposite flats, had betaken themselves to the marshes; the small birds restlessly passed and repassed; the gulls were on the wing fishing in the channel; there are drowned mice, bits of fish, and what not always being borne upstream from the town. The curlews and whimbrel were preening their feathers and sleeping on the rond west of us.

A few eels brought to us by an old Breydoner made a by no means unsavoury Sunday dinner, and the fry-pan was frizzling a merry tune. The steaming coffee added to a pleasant aroma. I wanted some brother naturalist to have dropped in just then, for there were enough dainties for two, and a chat with a kindred spirit is refreshing: and there had been sufficient birds to be seen that day to have delighted a dozen. After dinner I flung myself on the settles, threw a rug around me, and read myself into a refreshing sleep. I am like the heron; I have my fill and take a nap. . . .

When I awoke the tide had fallen, the flats had again become bare, and a host of various gulls were scattered all around, some asleep, some arranging their dainty plumage, and a few strolling about snatching up something towards a supper.

I had flung out a few minutes since some eel-bones, a

couple of small dead eels, and an opened bloater which had become tainted. I knew if the gulls did not find them the crabs most certainly would. I was scribbling these notes, when suddenly a beautiful adult common gull wheeled round, pounced on one of the sections of an eel, and bolted it. He next snatched hold of the bloater by the tail, when he was "flown at" by a couple of black-headed gulls. They all saw me simultaneously, for I was writing not half a dozen yards away, with my face to the open doors. Down dropped the bloater, and a few yards beyond dropped the gulls; one of the six black-heads—for there were by this time gathered half a dozen—had a mouse-grey hood split on the crown with a streak of white, and he had also a white chin. Two other adult birds were as white-headed as in winter, with the black ear-spots distinct and isolated. Another had a dark line running from each ear-spot to the crown; the others were blotched. So soon does the summer hood vanish after nesting-time in some. The common gull stood guard, so to speak, over the tit-bits, and both a-wing and a-foot drove off the others each time they were bold enough to presume. I finally told them all to go with a flourish of my hand.

The common gull still sits there a short way off, loth to leave so dainty a morsel, and he may yet pluck up courage to dash in and snatch it away. I am going to take another nap.

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AFTER EELS

Than eel-picking I do not know a more laborious occupation. It is simple enough when you get into the knack of it, but the continual jabbing and pulling soon become a weariness to the muscles, even when one drops in amongst a nice lot of eels. But more frequently than not one does not strike an eel for every thirty stabs.

I remember one fine August morning going up with Jary, who, wherever on Breydon he may be, cannot be otherwise than "watching." We went up beyond what is called the "garden," a large area freely covered with *Zostera*, among which, when the tide lifts, eels like to play—nearly to the Dickey Works. We went at high water, and waited until the tide had fallen to less than a foot in depth. Then we

began our "picking." I have known experts, "Limpeny" Joe (a man from Limpenhoe) in particular, who was a rare one to notice an eel-blow—a hole in the mud which the buried fish used for breathing purposes; there was a tail-hole, too, and "Limpeny" seldom struck with his pick but he withdrew it with a nice fat eel fast fixed in the prongs.

"He was a 'nailer,'" said "Snicker" Larn one day, when discussing the old school of Breydoners. "You didn't see him pickin' promiscuss-like; but he'd work the bare places, and never got armache with speckerlatin'. Gord bliss my sowl and body! *it was born in him!* None of us could touch him."

Jary and I picked in mechanical fashion, getting a nice mess each for dinner. There happened nothing eventful, but I suppose it was the glamour of the day, the pleasant gossip, and the novelty of the situation that impressed it on my mind; it was my first essay too as an eel-picker!

The eel-pick is a well-tempered steel weapon made something like one's hand of five fingers closely placed together, with sharp points and keen filed notches up either edge of the individual tines. One can half a large turnip with a thrust easier than it can be done with a knife. The tines are pliable, and an eel is held fast, sometimes threaded between them like a letter ∽. The pick, when used on the flats, has a four-foot shaft; when used in deeper drains or channel a correspondingly longer shaft is necessary. You stab or pick edgeways, for the eel lies horizontally in either mud or "grass." After a few stabs into the *Zostera* a big bunch of "grass" has accumulated on your pick, which becomes heavy with it; the pick is then drawn up and laid flat to the gunwale, and a wedge-shaped piece of wood used to push off the weed, which breaks off, or is cut by the tines as easily as cutting through celery. When an eel comes up a left-hand finger and the thumb, pressed in different directions, open the pliable steel tines, and the eel drops into the well of the punt, which it at once starts exploring, finally drawing itself tail first under the bottom-boards. Two to ten pounds of eels may reward a tide's work. One has to be careful not to be stranded on the flat; it is no easy matter to push even a punt over the flat grass.

When picking is done in the drains and channels, large

flounders, "eel pouts," and a variety of rubbish are sometimes pulled from the depths, the worst captures being a distorted bough or some sunken article made of metal.

Eel-picking is not nearly so profitable now as in days gone by. Fifty years ago as many as twenty-two eel-fishers might be seen picking at one time. Half a dozen is the most one sees to-day. Threepence a pound "as they run," and sixpence a pound for the larger ones, is a poor inducement for men to toil hard and long to capture them. The growing-up of the flats accounts largely for this, and eel-catching is now only pursued with ardour and some success up the rivers, the eel-setters who in autumn, when the eels are "running" for the sea, bar the river with huge-podded eel-sets, getting the lion's share.

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EEL-BABBING

Babbing is the favourite method of catching eels in local waters. It is a very simple process, and at certain seasons a fairly successful one. An eel-babber finds his day well taken up in procuring his worms, in bringing his catch to the wholesale buyer, and in babbing in the daytime when tides are right and the water in proper condition. "Sheer" [clear] water, and an easterly wind are abominations to the eel-fisher. Dark, warm, "thundery" nights are his delight, for the eels seem most hungry on such occasions.

The eel-babbers find worm-catching easy enough on moist, damp nights. A dark, ugly, blue-black kind of worm, tough and thin, is his favourite bait. Lobworms and "dew-worms" are useless, for the eels soon pull the babs to pieces with their sharp "pluck-pluck" and sharper little teeth. In dry weather deep spade work has to be done, and "wriggling" in grass plots and on low meadows. Wriggling is accomplished by thrusting deep into the ground a long iron spike, which is turned and roughly shaken in the soil, to the alarm of the worms that quickly come to the surface and are captured. A few dozen of these are threaded on worsted or shoemaker's hemp, and a big "necklace" made of them. This circle of threaded worms is then wound round and round the hand until a compact cluster is made,

amid which a leaden weight is tied. This is carefully placed in the boat, with a rod some eight or nine feet long, and the eel-babber goes forth to try his luck.

He rows to a likely spot in some drain, or to the side of the channel, or maybe he rows across Breydon and well up the river beyond. The boat having been fastened to two long stakes thrust in the mud, the silent man begins his silent occupation—"bob-bob-bobbing" the bait upon the bottom, keeping it in continual motion. An old Breydoner bobs with just such precision as a clock swings its pendulum. The vibrating "chuck" of the tiniest eel, no larger than a pencil, is felt immediately, and the fish is carefully but instantly hauled to the surface and held over the well of the punt, into which it almost directly falls, its teeth having become disengaged from the threads. Occasionally the eels may be prowling in three feet of water. Sometimes they must be "worked for," as some strange impulse may have made them keep to a six-foot depth. Temperature may have something to do with this phenomenon, for the eel, of all fishes, is most sensitive to external influences. Sometimes eels will bite furiously, and are hauled out two and three at a time, then all at once biting ceases. At another time they will bite freely enough but won't "hang" long enough to be captured. The biggest catch I ever made was near the harbour mouth one fine May night. I believe all the eel-catchers had a record time of it. Six, ten, and fifteen pounds of eels may be secured in a night, and from forty to fifty shillings is sometimes earned in a week. But eels are as uncertain as the winds, and the eel-catchers, although they have learned much of their habits, are at times at their wits' ends to make a living.

Eel-babbing is a strange, weird pursuit. Moored at the side, or midway in the silent black waters, in which fathoms deep twinkle the stars, the eel-man plies his lonely craft. There may not be a soul within shouting distance; maybe a brother fisherman, as silent as he, is pursuing the same strange occupation. You see a glow in the gloom as of a distant light, and you know some one has lighted his pipe: he is as silent as the stars. There are uncanny sounds heard at the hour of midnight—the plunge of fish, the "suck" of eel, the scream of some night-bird, the murmur of un-

known creatures floating over the flood. The tide ripples round the boat, and long phosphorescent lines trickle away beyond the stakes. Shore-crabs come up kicking and fighting over the bait and fall into the boat, making strange rasping noises as they creep round the sides; flotsam comes upstream from the town—broken baskets and such-like twirling oddly in the stream; you just catch sight of their blacker outlines, and conjure up queer thoughts of straying sea monsters. More than once a floating corpse has silently gone by with ghastly upturned face, sightlessly staring at the lone fisher. But one can get used to these things, and none of these move the stolid fisherman; they are part of his ordinary experiences. Early next morning, ready for a simple breakfast, he may be seen quietly paddling downstream solaced by his pipe—wondering at his luck when the "pailing time" comes—silent, self-reliant, satisfied—*perhaps*. As you watch him steadily rowing by, you look upon him as a strange, lone fellow, part and parcel of the wild lone life of Breydon!

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ON THE EEL

Much has been written on the eel, and only in recent years has its life-history become fairly well known, and but very recently have its spawning grounds been discovered. Breydoners still adhere to the old belief that it produces its young alive, and nothing will disabuse their minds of this belief. The old ideas of reproduction from horsehairs and other equally idle notions do not, however, find believers among them, nor will they accept the fact of its spawning. It is utterly useless to argue with them. Nor can you persuade them out of their belief in there being several different species of eels; they still talk of silver-bellies, grigs, brotts, glotts, and one or two others. Eel-fry are occasionally observed ascending the rivers from the sea; but the conditions on Breydon are not favourable to studying these juvenile travellers.

Eels are extremely cleanly in their habits; and I am not much in love with Ingoldsby's Lady Jane, whose husband, Sir Thomas, was found drowned in the family pond, and

who greedily ate the eels fattened at his expense. Eels are extremely sensitive to the cleanliness and freshness of their food. No sane babber would dream of using a last night's bab if the worms be but the slightest bit tainted. They are sometimes by no means particular in what they devour, provided it be fresh. Shrimps, gobies, young herrings, and small shore-crabs are diligently pursued, and even the young eels are greedily devoured at times.

Many are caught in summer on night-lines baited with sections of viviparous blennies, to which they are extremely partial. Others are caught in wicker eel-pots baited with live shrimps. They are exceedingly fond of the spawn of other fishes, and will greedily pursue the spawning roach and bream for that purpose. A large dead eel has been found with a water-vole fast in its gullet. Frogs and young waterfowl often fall victims to its voracity. I have seen the stomach of an eel, captured in a marsh ditch in a "lamb-net," distended with the ova of the sticklebacks whose nests it had been robbing.

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LADY BREYDONERS

In the old days the Breydoners' wives had to do their share towards the family's earnings. "Pintail" Thomas' mother used to hawk round "at gentlemen's housen," offering for sale wildfowl, smelts, and eels captured by her lord and master; and various hotel-keepers were amongst her regular customers. "Snicker" Larn mentioned others who did so, and remembered old "Poker" Lamb's and Cooper's "missuses" not only doing that, but helping their husbands to do the catching. He could remember when half a dozen of these queer women "regularly set the market" on Saturdays with various "game," including numbers of eels. One queer character was "Eeley" Bowles, a wrinkled old lady who "ripped off eel-skins as easy as shedding a glove." One morning a sympathetic customer pitied the victims and remarked to "Eeley":—

"How those poor creatures must suffer!"

"Oh, good gracious! no, ma'am," said "Eeley" Bowles, with an air of real surprise—"Law bliss yer, missus, they don't mind bein' skun; they're used to it!"

She had "skun" so many in her day that she had begun to think the eels a part of her own personality.

As a lad I used to gaze wonderingly on old "Betty" Fox, the last of the eel-women, who came regularly to market on Saturdays with a big kid of eels, mostly of a goodly size. She sold her eels at the then regulation price of sixpence per pound. She was dressed in some undescribable material that looked as if it had been fished out of Breydon; and was fronted with an old sack apron, with pockets to hold her takings.

Her scales were made of two ancient saucepan lids, not so well balanced as they might have been, each hung by three cords to a home-made beam of wood trimmed into shape with a knife. One seller's scales were made of a couple of wicker baskets, suspended from a rusty iron beam. The eels were kept in *sand;* this was to make them weigh heavy, and it all came off with the skinning. "Betty" was as artful as age and experience could make her. After weighing out, say, six or seven pounds, she seized each eel separately, holding it belly upwards firmly in a piece of rag or sacking. It was ripped and disembowelled ere it could squirm twice; an adroit stab immediately separated the head from the body, and with one dexterous twist and a sharp pull, its skin was taken off, as one draws down a stocking. If an "order" came from an hotel the fish were duly weighed, but "Betty" was inclined to be a bit careless (?) as to how far down the body the vertebræ-stabbing took place. Often a good two or three inches of nice fat eel would remain attached to the gaping head, inside the skin. A few pounds of eels, leaving sections behind them, would mean a dinner afterwards for "Betty" for nothing!

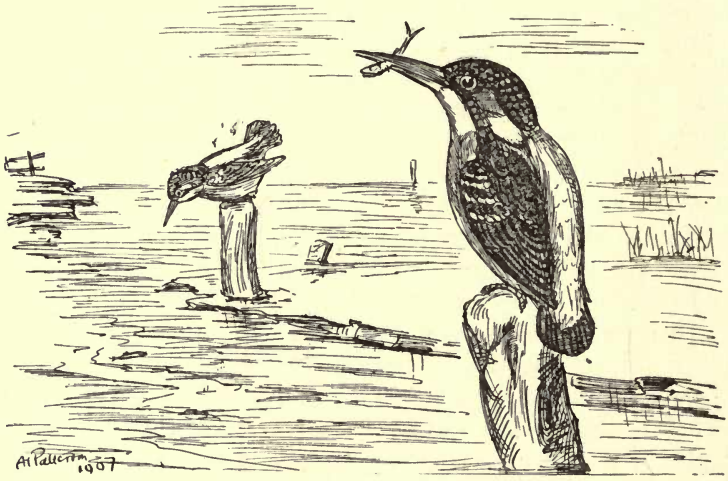
Gone are those queer and interesting days for ever, and with them most of those quainter characters which the place, the times, and the circumstances made distinctive. Illiteracy and the wild life brought out that which was strongest in their natures, making them unique and distinguished in the curious world they lived in. Those strong instincts and manners, which were brought into play by their environment and the exigencies of the life, are not so marked in their degenerate successors. Breydon has so greatly altered, and those who "follow" it to-day have to adapt themselves to

things as they find them. The Breydoner of to-day is not nearly so interesting an individual as the Breydoner of the past.

* * * * * *

DAY-DREAMING

It was a perfect autumn afternoon; soft fleecy clouds idly crawled across the sky, as if loth to hurry over the placid waters in which they were reflected. I sat in the stern of the *Moorhen*, sipping an after-dinner cup of tea, and watching the sand-martins flitting around the rond and walls, snapping



HALCYON DAYS. KINGFISHERS

up heedless flies. In less regular flight, a few swallows, old and young together, but taking small heed of each other, turned and twisted, darted, and fell back on their tracks, dodging insects that would escape them.

A kingfisher came and settled on a stump of my little jetty, and not seeing me, turned his back on me and sat for a few minutes as if deep in thought. He made a queer wring of his thick-set body when hurriedly scratching his head with his crimson left foot. He still sat thinking, and as men, when in deep thought, whistle, he screeched a queer shrill note or two, and then gathered himself together.

He suddenly lifted himself a-wing, as if he had decided

what to do, and after hovering a couple of feet above the water, dropped as if shot, his beak, up to his eyes, going below water; then back he came to his perch with a tiny herring—it seemed to be—in his mandibles. This he, rather awkwardly, I thought, banged on the stump, no doubt stunning it, "breaking its neck," I suppose *he* would have termed it; and without doubt he nipped it well at the same time. With a funny little upturned twist of his head he gobbled down his victim, helping it down with a little straining effort; he then shook his head, drew it into his shoulders, and sat thinking again. A ringed plover dashed by, piping him the "seal o' the day," without staying for a return of the compliment. Master Kingfisher did not deign to notice the courtesy, but simply turned his head to see who went by, and then sat dumpy again. Once again he poised himself a-wing, but only for a moment, and then threw himself on the water, this time bringing up to his stump what looked like a shrimp, or an *Idotea*, one of those long-horned crustaceans that zigzag about near the surface on sunny days.

I only moved a hand, but *Halcyon* saw me, and with a scream dashed away, dropping his prey. I saw it fall back into the water. A sand-martin just now dipped in his flight and snatched up an insect out of the salt tide. I wonder if he notices how salt it is? Some insects sit so lightly on the water that they hardly wet their feet: the sand-martin, I verily believe, can ship them up so neatly that the lower mandible does not even touch the surface. On the fresh waters I have seen these birds dip their bill readily enough, for the concentric rings that "pay off" from the point of contact are distinctly noticeable.

Our summer birds are evidently leaving us, The adult yellow wagtails are certainly gone; the wagtails that loaf about the weed-strewn walls are mostly pied of the year, only a few late-hatched of the yellow species still remaining with us. The buff-coloured young wheatears flick their tails on clayey boulder, and on the marsh rails: one of them hopped from our stick-box awhile ago, wherein he had been studying the habits of the earwigs which hide there. Four young kestrels are hovering about the walls—all within sight at one time—seeking field-voles; one or another stoops now and again to snatch up a dung-beetle, which it scrunches up

in a trice between whiles of waiting and searching for larger prey. I have seen a kestrel studiously examining a dung-heap, and not over-savoury are all the beetles to be found there!

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CATCHING THE SMELTS

A loud shout comes over the water from Jary. How sound travels across Breydon! I have heard the frogs croaking away on the Bradwell marshes, and Breydon here, at its widest part, is fully a mile across. My hearing may be keener than most folk's, but I have heard the cuckoo in May, on a peaceful morning, calling, "*Cuck-oo!*" to his mate in the trees yonder, that are even beyond the frogs' trysting places. I sit sometimes in the *Moorhen* on a still evening and distinctly hear the smelters comparing notes or exchanging greetings with the wherrymen passing them in the channel. One can tell by their voices often who are conversing. They seem usually to be grumbling. . . .

There is a good tide up, and we will sail right away across the flats; our brown sail fills with the breeze and lays our punt over to leeward, bringing the rail almost to the water. We draw but a few inches, and there are two feet of water below us. Now and again a winding drain, dark and snake-like, passes under us, while the green water curling from our bows turns over in two white crested waves that ripple past us and unite in a long bubbling line of foam. The waving sea-wrack brushes with soft and rasping noises under us, and thousands of tiny molluscs are seen clinging to the succulent fronds. Flounders dart away at our approach, leaving behind them a trail of smoky-looking ooze churned up by their undulating fins; crabs also run into hiding. Our speed is lessened once or twice as we charge through patches of "raw"; but on we race again as we break into open water once more, putting up gulls that have been crab-hunting, and one or two herons which have been taking a nap while waiting for the tide to fall. One can get as much exhilaration out of a cockle-shell of a punt with a steady breeze as out of an ocean greyhound, well knowing that the sheet may be let out in a twinkling in case of a stronger wind-puff; even in case of a spill one can scramble on his

feet again, and wade after his runaway in comparative safety.

There is not a gunner afloat to-day. Jary the watchman is Jary the *preventive man;* as with a policeman, it is not so much for the crimes he detects as for the infringements of the law he prevents that he is employed here. Time often hangs heavily on his hands on the top of the flood and at dead low water; but he has his smelt-net and little trawl, and sometimes he picks a mess of eels for supper. His smelt-net lies there at the stern of his open boat, and he has hailed me to go and have a turn at smelting with him. I am nothing loth to join him. . . .

"Now, then," said he, "look lively. I believe there's a lot of smelts up, and I mean gettin' a few."

Jary had unshipped his mast and sail and thrown them across the houseboat roof. The eighty-yard net is a simple seine, with a row of cork-floats above and a ground-rope weighted with leaden bullets. At either end is a short pole, weighted at the lower end to keep the net in position, while a long tow-rope at either end completes the apparatus. In days gone by braiding the nets was the work of the women, who were helped on the rough days by the more industrious of the men who did not prefer idling at the inn. Nowadays the net, minus the floats and sinkers, may be purchased ready made. When the men go off to fish it is placed, carefully stowed, in the stern-sheets, fold upon fold, so that in paying out it goes over smoothly and without kinks, righting itself as straight as a wall as the boat leaves it behind. Two pairs of oars, a basket in which to gather and wash the fish, and a trunk to contain them completed the paraphernalia, with the exception of a bottle of tea I had taken care to bring, and the pipe and matches, which Jary thought even more essential.

We rowed half-way up Duffell's drain, and should have gone further; but "Snicker" Larn and his confederates were "well up'ard" and waiting for the first of the ebb. In smelting you must have the assistance of the tides, either up or down—down preferably, because the smelts will have drawn off the flats into the deeper waters, and the water is thicker from the mud drawn into the drain.

Having reached our desired starting-place, I slipped over

the side of the boat into the shallow, and staggered on to the flat; one wants daily practice to wade neatly on the ooze in big water-boots. Jary assumed at once a different character. He now ordered me to "Easy a bit!" "Come on!" "Keep the net down!" in tones of authority which brooked no disputation.

It is a sorry slip-slod tramp, a mere crawl along the ooze, into which one's boots sink at every step, the mud holding one fast like a trap, out of which one pulls each leg alternately, with sucking sounds. The soft, slimy stuff closes directly the boot is withdrawn; and one had need be sharp sometimes not to leave a boot behind. As the tide drops off the flat the prostrate patches of weed are taken advantage of; for the mud is a little harder around them, and the fronds will prevent so quick a sinking. To the amateur it is leg-wearying work; and the clothes suffer woefully from the splash of silt and the dripping of muddy water. The professional Breydoner dresses like a scarecrow, and puts on his begrimed suit daily, adding to the grease and grime and scales of fish of many a previous fishing. He never brushes his clothes but with a boat-mop.

Crabs with uplifted claws threaten mischief as they scramble away, and shrimps skip about in the puddles. Jary rows steadily along the far side of the drain.

"When are you coming round?" I queried impatiently.

"Now d'rectly!" he shouted; "doan't you worrit!"

So I had to creep on, hanging to the tow-rope, with my end of the net sliding along at the margin of the stream. Presently Jary rowed in, and leaving the boat to run aground at its own time (the tow-rope being fast to a cleat inside her), he seized the rope and began in a stooping manner hauling in the net, keeping the bottom part low, and curved inward. At each double-handed pull the half-circle of the net grew slowly smaller, until when I had joined him more than half the net had come in. In its folds struggled crabs, and here and there a little fish that had gilled itself. Such smelts as had done so were adroitly pulled out and thrown towards the basket. Those that missed—and most did—kicked about in the soft mud until choked, covered, and exhausted by it.

All the interest now centred in the few remaining yards of

net, in which we could see fishes struggling and flicking their tails amid wrack and seaweed. With a careful pull the bight of the net was now pulled in, and we both began throwing bright cucumbery-scented smelts by the half-dozen into the basket.

"Look out!" shouted Jary, jerking a small weever from the net on to the mud, and jamming it deeply in. "I hate them warmin!"

The lesser weever is an ugly, oblique-mouthed wretch, with a stuggy little body only a few inches long, a vicious leer, and a stiff little dorsal fin—black, spiny, and poisonous, and right capable and adroit is he in using the needle-pointed spines. We got half a dozen weevers in all, and Jary "heeled" the lot. Several small herrings, five or six flounders of various sizes, an "eel-pout" or two, and quite a dozen silvery-sided fishes, which Jary called "smolts." I told him they were atherines; and he did not need telling they were dry, tasteless morsels, although sometimes they are foisted upon the ignorant for the more exquisitely tasting smelt. A couple of half-pound eels were left in the bight of the net until all the less troublesome inmates were basketed or thrown away, as their worth or uselessness suggested. Quite a bucket of crabs were pitched with the weeds on to the flat, to be rid of them. Those that had become hopelessly entangled in the meshes were unceremoniously wrenched to pieces; it was useless to think of clearing them without doing so. A few large shrimps and some white prawns were left kicking among the refuse.

The net having been rinsed, Jary carefully replaced it on the stern of the boat, and mopped down ready for another turn! The smelts, when rinsed, were laid in rows in the trunk; we got over fifty that haul. One haul is so much like another that it is needless to describe them all. When we got to the edge of the channel, just over the other side of the drain, we made a last haul down to the mouth of the "Ship" drain. The tide had fallen low, and the flat ran well into the channel. A softer bit of ground I had not drilled holes into for several years. I never had such an experience as that—sink, pull, suck, and wriggle, which passed for progress. Once I overbalanced myself, sank on all fours, and certainly feared that Jary would have to drop his line and come and

dig me out. But I persevered and came up smiling and—muddy. There was a capital catch in the net this time, and we were very elated. We were hurrying, too, to get in the net before the passenger steamer should pass us, for the heavy swell she makes throws a long, sweeping billow on the flat, the roar of which may be heard across Breydon. Unfortunately, the skipper yielded to the solicitations of the crowd aboard to "go in closer, and see 'em!" and before we could get the fish-packed bight of the net in, in came the billow, the retreat of which pulled the underside of the net out, letting the fish slip away in a body. I could not help laughing, but what Jary said is not for these pages.

Our total catch was not a despicable one; and when Jary bolted down on the last of the ebb to replenish his food-bag and water-bottles, he took most of them with him, and packed them off in boxes to the London market.

The fish that at times find themselves with the smelts in the net are exceedingly varied in species: flounders, bibs, gobies, grey mullet, and shads. Sometimes, in October, great hauls of codlings and whitings are made, and when news of this gets adrift all available boats are secured by sea-anglers, and good sport is obtained. Gluts of codling are rare. In October, 1890, they came up Breydon in huge shoals. Young pollacks, too, now and then, turn up in numbers, and occasionally a coal-fish. I have records of grey and red gurnards taken. A few years ago some small mackerel strayed here; and in 1906 I saw a fine scad hauled in with smelts. Lamperns, and rarely fine lampreys, are also taken; and the mysterious burbolt has once or twice been captured, but I was not fortunate enough to see it. The old Breydoners assure me they *know* it, and call it the sea eel-pout.

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A SMELTER'S REMINISCENCES

Jary had left me in charge of the houseboat, and I was glad to turn in for tea, for I could not get back to the *Moorhen* until "tide-up" in the early morning. I had just settled to tea when "Snicker" hailed me. I offered him and his mates a drink each, and they were glad of it. In the few minutes of their stay beside the houseboat we started chatting

on their favourite subject—the good old days. Poor old fellows! perhaps they have fallen on evil times. I know for a fact that "Snicker" and his "pals" for two whole days in November, 1906, captured *twenty-nine* smelts! His contention was that so many steamers [luggers] fishing in and out of the harbour drove them away!

"What luck, Larn?" I asked.

"Middlin'!" said he.

"What's the biggest haul and largest prices you've known smelts taken and fetch?"

"The biggest haul was that 'ere job of Ribbons's—seventy score;[1] in the middle of May, two yeer ago [1905], I remember five and ninepence a score bein' cleared after all railfears and Billin'sgate dues was paid, and comin' home. That wor a top figger: two shillin's a score is more nearer the mark. It's allers the way—in cums the fish and down goes the markets, ain't it, 'Short 'un'?"

"What's that?" said little "Short 'un," who had not caught the remark.

"*Good tea!*" said Larn, for Jary had left the kettle on the hob since noontime. A handful of tea popped in the kettle is the usual dose, and an every other day's emptying of the accumulated refuse is the custom.

In between sips Larn volunteered the facts that smelt-nets average seventy-five yards in length, and are ten feet deep, costing complete about five pounds.

"When I was a kid of nine, workin' with my father, the channel was so shallow, and the rise and fall wasn't more 'an four feet, we useter stake smelt-nets athort, three on 'em perhaps bein' put in a few hundred yards apart. The smelts useter to gill themselves, and we got twenty and thirty score a day, sometimes, with very little trouble. We useter watch the wherries comin' up and down, and lower 'em till they went by. Tides, 'bor? Why, at the bar theer was so little water at low tide that you could hardly shove a shrimp boat over.

"Smelts hang about here most of the year, but you know, in course, they go up-river to spawn in the spring. I've seen 'em here in August jumpin' at the herrin'-syle like a pike at a roach."

[1] Vide *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, pp. 93–4. A week's catch realised £14.

"You've seen queer things here?" I suggested.

"*Hev* I!" emphasised "Snicker." "I've seen porpoises tumblin' about here, and more 'an one seal. Then look at that great sturgeon we got.[1] One day we was goin' past the Dickey Works and I see suffin' floatin'. I know'd in a minnet what it wor—*it wor a dade body.* We rowed up to it, and seed a poor gal, with her face still red as if alive, and her hands clinched athort her brist. 'Poor gal!' I said, lookin' at her, with a bunch of reeds tangled in her hair and a yeller water-lily clutched in her hand. 'Why, that's poor M——!' I said; and then we remembered it was her as was missin', but how she cum up heer was a mystery. The feller as had got her into trubbel done a guy [ran away], and her father turned her out. Poor gal! she was out of her trubbel now. 'Mates,' I said, 'if we tow her down, we shorn't git more 'an five bob, and perhaps luse more 'an a day, not includin' the inquest. Some one'll see her lower down, and we can't do her no good.' So we rowed on, but heerd afterward as they fished her out agin the lower Ferry at Gorleston. They brought it in suicide," he added.

"*Murder!*" I said, "would have been nearer the mark."

"You ain't far out," said Larn. "Thank 'ee—that was a good drop," he added, "but we must be agoin'. So long!"

"So long!" said the others.

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MULLET-CATCHING

Mulleting is now out of date on Breydon, for the nets cannot be worked on the flats; if they were there would be no grey mullet to catch. Only odd fish now occasionally come into the smelt-nets. The flats on which they loved to prowl were seldom dry thirty and forty years ago. The nets, with their big twelve-inch meals [meshes], on either side, were staked on the flats at the bottom of the ebb, and the fish in their travels "pocketed" themselves. Some nets were two hundred yards in length. They were also staked alongside the flats lengthways with the tide, and the mullet would net themselves in going off the flat, endeavouring to reach deeper water. In "drawing" for them great care had

[1] Vide *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, pp. 248–9.

to be exercised, for they had a knack of jumping the net-rope as sheep jump hurdles, in a crowd.

Old "Pero" Pestell was on one occasion rowing down the channel, when a curious freckled appearance on the surface of the water near the "north" (drain) against the Knowle momentarily suggested to him a shower of rain. He at once, however, saw it was an immense shoal of mullet at play. He hastened home and told "Poker" Lamb, who, with Charles Brackenbury and old Jack Edmonds (all notorieties), were then thinking of going up Breydon with their nets. Pestell accompanied them to the "north," and they speedily surrounded the shoal. Brackenbury remained in one boat outside the bight of the net, "splouncing" with a pole, in order to keep the frightened fish from jumping out. But the mullet did not intend to be taken, and one or two jumped over in spite of the rumpus, and were followed by the whole school of magnificent fishes. When the net was hauled in only a solitary individual was found remaining in it.

"The *language!*" remarked Pestell, "well, I cleared out!" And it would take something abnormal in that line to frighten "Pero."

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IN BRACING DAYS

October on the whole is a fairly interesting month; fine days intervene between those of rougher kind, and the air is bracing. The nights are longer, and are occasionally frosty. There is a fishy aroma pervading the flood tide, for the Scotch and English luggers are steaming in and out the harbour with their cargoes of silvery herrings. The gulls muster up in considerable numbers; they too are following the herring shoals, and spend many of their leisure hours on the mud-flats, often staying there, content with the offal from the boats which floats up the river.

Wading birds come and go, and the gunners prowl around and among the drains and channels. Most of the birds have assumed the sober dresses which distinguish them in winter. A few now and then, such as knots and curlew-sandpipers, are found tinted with ruddy hues, but the majority of the birds are no longer eligible as specimens, save for the "pot."

Land birds are seen passing over, pursuing their quest of a winter dwelling-place. The swallows have gone, and larks and linnets people the marshes, visiting the walls for provender; there the snow-bunting joins them. Grey plovers rush in when the winds are easterly, and ducks when the winds are from the north.

The west winds bring drizzle and discomfort, and Breydon then is a place for those only who are vigorous, and who do business there. The hooded crows take possession of it, and "*caw*" loudly their recognition of their old winter haunts. They will mount some stile to watch the passer-by, and "*caw*" their displeasure at his intrusion.

CHAPTER VII

BREYDON GULLS AND BREYDON CRABS

IF I were asked to state what I considered to be *the* characteristic bird of Breydon, I should unhesitatingly say the gull. At no season of the year is the place absolutely free from representative members of this *genus*. It is to them a refuge in time of storm and stress. They repair to it on finer days to rest and sleep off the effects of too liberal a meal on the herring-grounds. In times of scarcity there is seldom a period of famine here, save when the waters are ice-bound; and here they come to gossip, to bathe, and to plan out new enterprises for the morrow. The various gulls that haunt this tidal basin follow no hard and fast rules of conduct and procedure, their movements being chiefly governed by the ebbing and flowing of the tides; and when extra high tides cover the highest "lumps" they are sometimes much inconvenienced. Usually, say, in the summer months, you will find them — the black-backed gulls and their juniors, the "greys," and the common and herring gulls that frequently consort with them (the latter mostly in immature stages)—somnolent and idle at daybreak, and remaining, performing their ablutions and their toilet, until the sun has peered above the housetops. Then some will prowl around among the prostrate "grass" (if the tide be low) in search of shore-crabs and stranded fish; and will hunt more assiduously for the crabs that begin to scamper about as the rising tide lifts the wrack. The smaller gulls will repair to the channel and the drains. Sometimes they are noisy; at other times, more especially if there be a stirring wind, they fish silently. Later, as early autumn comes on, the black-headed species begins to muster up, the adults with their mouse-coloured hoods still perfect, the speckled-plumaged youngsters of the year bearing them company. They are more often noisy than quiet, and their laughing cries resound all over the flats.

They delight to fly in airy troupes up and down the channel when the tide is rising, dipping lightly, toe-deep, into the flood for floating fragments, and tiny fish and various crustaceans thrown out of the shrimp-boats by the shrimpers from amid last night's catches. If it be low water they prowl about by the channel sides, or hunt in the "lows" left on the flats, for living prey. It is odd to see them step into these pools, at most an inch or two deep, lift up their tails, and with heads drawn in, and looking downwards, taking stock of the shrimps and gobies left there, and which scuttle around seeking shelter, or plunge into the soft ooze for safety. Now a ditch prawn, then a *Gammarus*, and now again a "whitebait" fails to evade those red mandibles; those in hiding remain there; but the black-head has learned a trick or two, and he begins literally to dance, his bright red feet pattering on the mud with the speed of clockwork. This is too much even for a goby's love of hiding, and out it bolts to seek some other cover, but is snapped up on its way. It is an exceedingly pretty sight to see a large company of these dainty *Laridæ* dancing for a breakfast!

Quite a number of greater black-backed gulls, free this year of nesting duties, stay with us all summer through. In late autumn their numbers are increased by the arrival of wanderers down the coast, who are following the inshoring herring-shoals; and they now divide their day between Breydon and the fishing grounds. In fine weather great triangular flocks fly seawards to spend the night among the fishing fleet, and glean up a rich repast by sharing the spoils with the often irate fishermen, from whose nets they pilfer with great audacity. There is a large mustering, at nearly all hours of the day, around the harbour mouth, from October until the beginning of December. These seem to me to be gulls that trouble Breydon very little, for when replete with dead herrings they have snatched from the breakers, they will rest for hours upon the sea in a long straggling line, often a mile in length; and often they are seen asleep there until towards evening, when they fly away northward, probably to spend the night on the Wells marshes, returning at daybreak in low-flying flocks. Then, too, at various times of the year, parties of gulls, tabooing Breydon, resort in the daytime to the fields, and pass over

to sea in the evening, reversing these tactics at other periods, notably in the autumn.

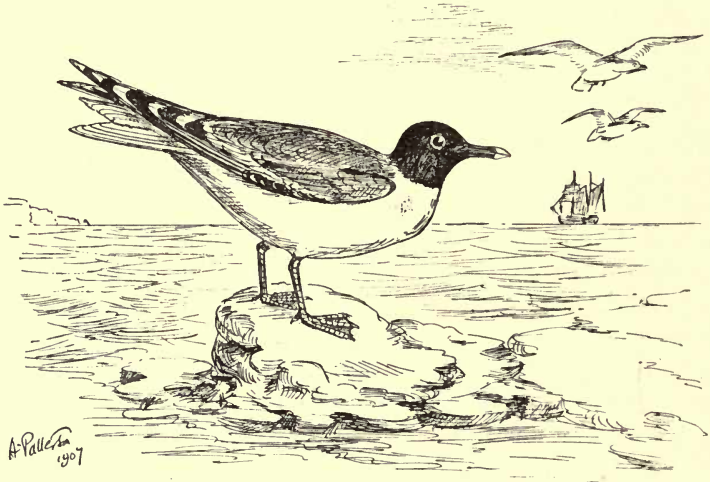
Undoubtedly at intervals Breydon is visited by all these various contingents. In winter the black-heads are still with us, and spend much of their time in the severest days flying up and down the river, quite in the heart of the town, picking up then a very precarious living. The larger gulls also pass much of their time hunting up and down the channel, glad at times to patrol the edges of the flats in search of carrion. Dead rats, kittens, mice, and even larger quadrupeds are eagerly discussed. When strong winds are blowing they will draw together in closely formed flocks and stand, head to wind, listless and cheerless, until the rising tide or the calls of hunger demand some movement.

One is always seeing some queer incident, who cares to watch these commonplace birds; for their struggle for existence must be keen, considering their numbers, and what a vast amount of food they must require to feed them daily. An old gunner complained to me that we should never get many wildfowl again, for the gulls "clear off all the feed." I certainly believe them to be much more numerous since they have been afforded protection; and sometimes try to estimate what weight of crabs and other food they can devour in a single day on Breydon.

A few "gull" entries from my notebook may be instructive:—

"*January 18th*, 1904.—James Hurr, an aged gunner who was at one time a well-known puntsman, sat by my fireside this evening and discussed his reminiscences of gulls. During a heavy gale in the early winter of 1883, Hurr went to the beach for gulls, and anything that might 'turn up.' The wind was blowing heavily from the east. Soon after he reached the beach he observed a pomatorhine skua, at which he fired, but missed it. The next day he returned to the beach, hoping to meet with this bird again. He had barely reloaded his gun, after a shot, when a small gull came tripping by. Bringing the gun hurriedly to his left shoulder (for he shot as much left as right) he brought down the bird, the next long, sweeping wave washing it to his feet. He noticed that the tail was forked, and thought it 'a curiosity'; and as it was his practice to keep birds clean, 'curiosities' in particular, he made a hollow in the sand above the tide-mark, and laid the gull therein to cool and

stiffen. Not long after came along a 'bosun skua,' as he called it [a Buffon's skua], and this with a left-hand shot he killed. When this was cool he wrapped the two birds in his handkerchief and made for home, when, trudging along by the edge of the water, the skua of yesterday came flying towards him; this he also secured. Later in the day he took the 'fork-tail' to a local collector, who was then living at Gorleston, who offered him two guineas for it, honourably enough telling him if he could get more, to do so. Hurr took the bird to Norwich, and left it with Stevenson, who was then too ill to see him, but who eventually sent him three guineas for it, which, with what he obtained for the



A RARE VISITOR. SABINE'S GULL

others, made him, he said, 'a good day's work.' This Sabine's gull realised no less than eleven guineas at Stevenson's sale in September, 1887."

Hurr once obtained a commission from a London millinery firm, when gulls' wings and plumage were in demand for the adornment (?) of ladies' heads, "to shoot gulls until further orders." One day he killed twenty odd gulls of various species, including one black-headed gull. They called off their original offer of two and sixpence for each large gull and one shilling for every small one, but sent him ten shillings for this consignment, "for the small gull *and his trouble*." Afterwards he sent them as many gulls as altogether brought him in twenty-five pounds. His practice

was to go to Caister in the early morning, and, getting under the lee of the sandhills, dig a hole and hide himself, shooting the birds as they came in from the sea "to go for their early morning feed on the land." Of course, Breydon was frequented at intervals in order to make up his consignments.

He once shot a small gull on Breydon in very hard weather, and waited for the tide to bring it to the edge of the rond. Before the bird floated within reach a grey gull stooped and snatched up the little victim, and flew towards the flats with it, where he immediately started to pull it in pieces and to devour it. A heron, equally sharp-set, dashed at the larger gull and attempted to share in the spoils, but after a rough-and-tumble scrimmage was driven off by the original thief.

It was Hurr who, up the North River, shot a large gull that had just come in from sea, with its breakfast snatched from the herring nets, and which, on falling mortally wounded, disgorged no less than eleven herrings. In truth an avine glutton!

One now and again sees a gull from whose mouth a piece of cord is depending; in all probability it is kept there by a fish-hook fast in its gullet. Such a one remained in the neighbourhood of Breydon for many weeks.

A gull was shot on one occasion, and on going to pick it up the gunner saw what he thought to be a piece of cord hanging from its mouth; on pulling it out it was found to be a rat's tail, with the freshly killed rat attached to the other end of it!

"*October 12th*, 1906.—Strolling along the seashore this morning, I was much interested in watching the steam drifters coming home from the fishing grounds. One boat in particular caught my attention by the enormous number of gulls flying around it, which, through my binoculars, looked like a swarm of bees buzzing around a hive. Although the boat was going at full speed, the birds flew round and round it, apparently without effort, stopping at intervals to squabble for broken herrings thrown over by the fishermen, who were shaking and emptying their nets as the boat sped homewards, and catching up again with their companions with the greatest ease imaginable."

"*October 13th*, 1906.—There must have been 4000 gulls on

Breydon this afternoon, soon after the tide fell. At least 3000 were *Larus ridibundus*. The remainder were black-backed gulls and common gulls. In long white rows, showing in strong contrast to the sombre mudflats, they reminded me of freshly built flint 'walls,' with the chalk still adhering. The firing of a gun put to flight a veritable cloud of gulls."

"*April 23rd*, 1906.—These mixed flocks of gulls are very interesting to watch; seldom are they all really quiet—as a rule one or more are continually dropping into the thick of a crowd from the outside, like the odd pig round a trough, when short, spirited protests and petty squabbles take place on each occasion. All heads to wind. Wind N.W., strong."

"*July*, 1906.—A sailor fell overboard from a vessel in the North Sea and drifted away unnoticed by the crew. He was an expert swimmer, and managed to keep afloat, throwing off his garments as opportunity offered, in order to disencumber himself as much as possible. A flock of gulls gathered round and viciously attacked him, seriously mauling his back; and it was only by great exertions on his part that they were kept at bay. His struggles at length attracted the notice of the crew of a passing ship, who promptly lowered a boat and rescued him in a very exhausted condition. His injuries were attended to, and he very soon recovered. It is most unusual for gulls to attack a living man, although a floating corpse is rarely let alone."

"*July 24th*, 1906.—Myriads of whitebait [herring-syle] flashing about in Breydon. I was much interested in the way that a group of gulls, who were eagerly feeding upon them, would drop in a bunch over a congested shoal, their actions seeming to drive the fishes helplessly together, thus making them an easier prey.[1] It is possible that the eels, which are exceedingly partial to young herrings, were harassing them below."

"*July 29th*, 1906.—Some greater black-backed gulls fishing in about a foot of water, over the flat near Jary's houseboat,

[1] Sir R. Lloyd Patterson, in *The Irish Naturalist* of October, 1904, refers to a similar procedure, under the title of "'Plays' of Birds and 'Balls' of Fry." "Among the birds may be seen all the commoner gulls in great variety of plumage. . . . A number of the larger fish must make a simultaneous attack on a shoal of fry below, which are thus driven closer together and towards the surface, when they are noticed by the smaller divers, who 'go for them' in such a manner that, circling round the outer extremity of the shoal of fry, the fish composing it become still more closely driven into a mass. . . . The outer portion . . . shows at the surface, and is there exposed to the attacks of the surface-feeding gulls." The tactics of these Breydon gulls seemed formed on precisely similar lines.

wherein I stood observing them through a window. They sat with bills pointing downwards, closely watching the shore-crabs dodging in and out among the *Zostera*, and dipping at them with a queer duck-like plunge as they came within striking distance. The gulls could not dive owing to their buoyancy, but would plunge head first down (sometimes rising quite a foot or more from the water to gain a greater impetus), pushing with their feet as they made this half-circular movement. It was very funny to see how flustered a gull would become when, clutching submerged grass as well as crab, he became temporarily anchored, and had to let go in order to regain his breath. As soon as a crab was brought to the surface it was crushed and immediately swallowed."

THE SHORE-CRAB

Most interesting little fellows are the common shore-crabs, and distinguished though they be by the epithet of green, they exhibit extremes in colouration from grass-green to vivid blue, and yellowish grey to a decided red; but for their similarity in shape one might be forgiven for not knowing on sight that an emerald-carapaced "sea-sammy" and one of a brick-red hue are in reality blood relations.

Ugly and spider-like as the casual observer may pronounce the shore-crab, with, as one writer remarks, "a cruel, cold, triangular, inhuman face, with eyes set wide apart, with cruel hairy mandibles and chinless face, the whole expression being one of brutal lust, without one ray of light to illumine the dreadful countenance," it is bold, active, cunning, pugnacious; and half swimming, half crawling, shuffles and scrambles about in search of food, not refusing the vilest carrion, and pulling down and devouring with equal relish any living creature that superior strength or strategy can waylay and master. Such victims are torn and eaten piece-meal, with a greed and evident enjoyment that borders on the ghastly!

But ghoul though it be, its very rapacity entitles it at least to our toleration, if not respect, for its mission seems to be the appropriation and destruction of the carrion which, if it were not for the crabs, would become more loathsome still. But it is no favourite of the fisherman and angler, whose nets it inconveniences by its struggles amongst the meshes, or

whose lines are continually denuded of baits. Quite common sounds in the gloom of a Breydon night are the thud and scrunch when some irate eel-babber, fishing in silence, smashes a crab on the deck of his punt; sometimes you may hear a muttered curse against these despoilers of his worms. There must be countless thousands of them shambling about on the flats when the tide is in, or scuttling about, chasing each other, or searching for prey, in the channels and drains; the trawler for bait brings up his net with pecks of them kicking, jostling, threatening, biting everything within their reach; the smelter draws in numbers at each haul—sometimes quite a half-peck of them! And the babber only too well knows the slow, steady pull at his bunch of worms; so different from the quick, electrical "pluck-pluck" of the eels, that succeed in getting "a bite in" before the *smell* of the bait has guided the crustacean to its goal. As your houseboat begins to lift herself out of her muddy hollow, on the incoming tide, you can hear the long scratching rasp of crabs, waking up to hunt upon the flood, as they scamper one after the other in queer procession under her planks.

That the crab follows up and discovers food more by scent than by sight I am convinced. I had thrown out some herring-milts and the heads of some bloaters; these fell into about four or five inches of water. In a few moments several crabs that had been lying in hiding were observed hurrying up, without their usual cautious manœuvrings, against the tide, endeavouring to outstrip each other in their race for the coveted prizes. Now and then one would stop, like a hound losing the scent, and recovering it, as the moving water brought the "aroma" within its reach again, it would shuffle along, to stop a moment to threaten with outstretched pincer-claws an equally eager rival. I must admit there was some loathsomeness in the way the fragments were seized upon and dragged away into hiding behind the dark, rough fucus, that hung in festoons from the wooden stumps protecting my rond-edge.

One August afternoon a smelter brought me a mess of eels and smelts, the majority of which I cleaned for the evening meal. A few of the smallest ones, with several undersized flounders, I threw into the shallow water near

my landing-stage at the edge of the rond. The swirl of the gentle eddy evidently carried with it the "flavour" of the fishes that gleamed in the clear current or darkened the brown-grey mud with spots of a deeper brown. Presently one crab and then another peered out from the pendent seaweed and began scrambling out into the open. Two meeting as they converged upon a smelt halted, seemed to judge of each other's pluck, or want of it, threatened and sparred, then backed a few paces, still with pincer-claws extended, daring each other to "come on!" But others slyly passing them aroused the devil of greed, and dropping differences from very selfishness, the two seized a smelt between them and commenced a tug-of-war. They were well matched for size and courage, but how the rivalry would have ended I cannot say, for one of them, either more discreet or more selfish than the other, scenting as well as seeing another dead fish a few inches off, dashed at it and bore it away. The other, taking good care to profit by the fortunate circumstance, bolted into hiding with its prize. The smaller ones, hardly so daring, seized here and there a fish, but gave way when a more powerful fellow came upon the scene, returning to the tasty viands in a surreptitious sort of way when the bully was observed stuffing and cramming the torn-off fragments into its scissor-like-working "jaws." Any movement that hinted aggression was instantly challenged, but only in a half-threatening manner, with one extended, upraised pincer-claw, while the other was still busily and rapidly at work wrenching and cramming. It looked odd to see a little green crab dragging sideways to its retreat a flounder four times its own size! It was a display of gluttony that was interesting, if unedifying. It was rare to see two crabs actually fighting, for all their skirmishing and menace. They took infinite pains to approach each other under cover, and then indulged more in a spiritless spar than an actual tussle, and their quaint, grotesque pretences at duelling ended without harm to either individual. In a quarter of an hour all the fish had been taken to their hiding-places, and the arena was once more clear, until some rather disappointed crab, eager for more, would make a sudden dash into the open to inspect a fragment of floating weed or stick, to retire again disgusted,

or if surprised at a movement on my part, to seize the soft ooze in all his claws, as one might push in the hand and close upon it, and sink in a moment or two out of sight, remaining buried, all but the tips of the stalky eyes which, barely uncovered, ogled one in comparative safety. But remove the eye a moment, and then seek him again; I'll warrant you'll not easily fix upon the exact spot where he lies concealed.

That the crab has immense strength for his size can be easily proved by letting him nip you with his pincers! I brought home a little fellow about the size of a five-shilling piece. Holding him up, I placed a tin box-lid within reach of him. He immediately seized it with a pincer-claw. Weight by weight I continued dropping into it scale-weights until it contained no less than five ounces. The other pincer-claw was equally strong. I placed another into a small globe without a drop of water. For four days he sulkily remained therein, wondering at his imprisonment. At the end of the time a "soft" crab (one that had recently moulted its shell) was given to him, whereupon he fell to and made a goodly meal of it. I let him go back to the river on the fifth day; he was still game and quarrelsome when I threw him in.

Small boys, who go "crabbing" at the quaysides, delight in wrenching off the shore-crab's pincer-claws; the hard-nipping creature can then be handled and played with with impunity; in most instances a general smash-up follows on the expedition. Occasionally the mutilated crabs are thrown into the river again, to hunt and feed as best they can; which they certainly manage to do, for they will sometimes return to the baits provided by other urchins, clinging tenaciously thereto with all their remaining legs, and gnawing ravenously at them. But it is seldom you find a clawless crab on Breydon, which goes to prove that they do not often fight seriously amongst themselves, and that they soon replace these lost members, and make as good use of them as before. All summer long the shore-crab infests the shallows, sometimes wandering for miles up the adjacent rivers; in the colder months it keeps to the deepest channels, and is then not so actively aggressive.

It is seldom that a "soft" crab is netted on Breydon, the moulting being carried on in the cavities under the flints

that are scattered here and there, behind the hanging heaps of fucus, under and among the roots of the *Zostera*, and undoubtedly in the ooze itself. At certain intervals hundreds of thousands of white chalky skeletons, perfect in carapace and to claw-tips, are strewn along the high-water line on the walls and ronds; sometimes they are uniformly the size of a horse-bean; then they average about farthing-size, then a halfpenny; and so on until the late autumn, when they run as large as a half-crown. Rightly fearing danger, the crabs wisely hide during this period of weakness. I have never yet detected one casting its shell.

In turn the shore-crab is himself largely preyed on. Various gulls hunt most assiduously for him, smashing the carapace and killing him instantly by a nip of their powerful mandibles. You will sometimes find six and seven in a row in the stomach of the eel; codlings are often packed with them; and small examples are eagerly devoured by various shore-birds.

Shore-crabs taken in nets off the foreshore are invariably brighter coloured than those captured on a muddy bottom. Breydon crabs are as dully hued as the mud over which they shamble.

I saw an exceedingly funny incident in which a rook and a crab figured on July 30th, 1906. The rook was foraging for his breakfast on one of the flats not many yards away from me, when I was looking out of the window of Jary's houseboat, when suddenly he came across a shore-crab hunting here and there for anything it might find good to eat. Hopping in a sort of self-congratulatory manner up to the crab, he was about to seize it, when the crustacean raised itself on its claw-tips and showed fight with its pincer-claws. The rook was taken aback, and hesitated, the crab taking advantage of this show of timidity, and scuttling back a few inches, on which the rook came at him again. The menace was repeated, and the bird again drew back. This manœuvre was repeated four or five times, the wily crustacean getting nearer to the drain at every run. The rook seemed at last to be really making up its mind to seize the crab at all hazards, but he was too late, for with another spurt the crab had reached the water and tumbled in. The rook looked exceedingly foolish, and appeared to be really comforted by the fact that no rival had seen the incident.

CHAPTER VIII

FROM THE WATCHER'S NOTEBOOK

THROUGH the courtesy of H. A. Frederick, Esq., Secretary to the Breydon Protection Society, I had the opportunity of overhauling the notebooks kept by the two Breydon watchers, viz. "Ducker" Chambers, who held the post from 1888 to 1899 inclusive, and "Newcome" Jary, who was appointed in 1899, and continues to occupy the position. I have omitted certain years' statistics, which have already been published.[1] In the earlier years the "entries" were very spasmodically kept, but an improvement came about under Jary's regime, and as he usually added the direction of the prevailing wind, some interesting comparisons can be made by the ingenious reader. Here and there matters of small account have been left out, and only those items likely to be of interest have been made use of. The composition and spelling are Jary's own.

JARY'S ENTRIES, 1901–1906

1901

April 1*st.*—Two hundred and fifty widgeon, several grey plovers, some mallard, two wild geese, lot of knots, dunlins, and ringed plovers. W.; strong.

„ 8*th.*—Three hundred widgeon, some pintails, grey plovers, hundreds of gulls of all kinds. S.W.; strong.

„ 12*th.*—A spoonbill, and great numbers of widgeon.

„ 16*th.*—Spoonbill still here; many ringed plovers and dunlins. N.; strong.

„ 17*th.*—Cormorant here to-day. N.E.; fine.

[1] See *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, pp. 150–3, and *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, pp. 48–9.

April 21*st.*—An oyster-catcher flying about; a few whimbrel and several common terns, also a black tern or two. S.E.; fine.

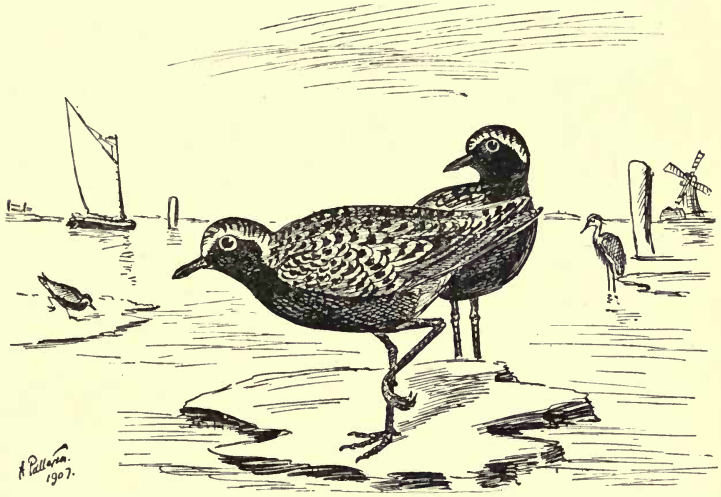
„ 22*nd.*—Eight white-winged black terns, and several swallows flying across. S.E.; fine.

„ 26*th.*—Twelve spoonbills here to-day. N.E.; fine.

„ 28*th.*—Spoonbills gone. S.; fine.

May 3*rd.*—A lot of whimbrel and fourteen Egyptian geese here this morning. N.E.; fine.

„ 4*th.*—Some sheld-ducks and some scaups here to-day. N.E.; cold, dull.



IN SPRING ATTIRE. GREY PLOVERS

May 5*th.*—A great many whimbrel and a few black-breasted (grey) plovers. S.E.; fine.

„ 12*th.*—Some lesser terns, two turnstones. Widgeon nearly all gone. N.E.; fine.

„ 13*th.*—Several grey plovers and a few *more* (!) godwits here to-day. N.E.; strong.

„ 15*th.*—A few more godwits; several terns, some lesser and some black, also one white-winged black tern. E.; strong.

„ 16*th.*—Two spoonbills here, and a couple of sheld-ducks. Plenty of whimbrel, plover, and godwits. N.E.; strong.

„ 17*th.*—Ten gadwalls; several godwits, plovers, and whimbrel. N.E.; strong.

May 22*nd.*—A large flock of terns flying to windward early this morning, some black ones amongst them. N.E.; strong.

„ 26*th.*—Two spoonbills, some sheld-ducks, and a great many ringed plovers, a curlew or two, and a diver.

„ 28*th.*—Some swifts flying about this morning. W.; fine.

„ 30*th.*—Three spoonbills, several grey plovers, most of them black-breasted, and a lot of dunlins and ringed plovers. S.W.; fine.

June 4*th.*—Four spoonbills here to-day. W.; fine.

„ 5*th.*—A cormorant here to-day. S.W.

„ 7*th.*—Three tame swans. E.; fine.

„ 17*th.*—Some mallard and a few curlews and four spoonbills here to-day. N.; squally.

„ 20*th.*—Some lesser terns, curlews, and whimbrel, and a few redshanks and ringed plover. S.W.; fine.

„ 23*rd.*—Five sheld-ducks and several widgeon here. S.W.; strong.

„ 28*th.*—Four spoonbills and several young herons; a few whimbrel and curlews. S.S.E.; fine.

July 3*rd.*—Two spoonbills left to-day. S.; fine.

„ 5*th.*—A great many redshanks to-day. N.E.; fine.

„ 8*th.*—Two spoonbills, several young mallard, a few greenshanks, and a lot of redshanks. S.S.E.; fine.

„ 12*th.*—Two cormorants. E.; fine.

„ 16*th.*—Several whimbrel and curlews, dunlins, and ringed plovers. S.; fine.

„ 19*th.*—A great many redshanks and some turnstones. E.; fine.

„ 21*st.*—A Caspian tern here and two spoonbills. N.W.; fine.

„ 26*th.*—A great many birds here to-day. Sheld-ducks, terns, dunlins, ringed plovers, curlews, curlew-sandpipers, and two spoonbills. S.; fine.

„ 29*th.*—Thousands of birds here to-day. E.; fine.

„ 30*th.*—An avocet here to-day. S.E.; fine.

Aug. 3*rd.*—Two spoonbills left, after being here about ten weeks. S.E.; fine.

„ 9*th.*—Avocet still here, and many birds: whimbrel, redshanks, knots, dunlins, and ringed plovers. W.; fine.

Aug. 18*th.*—Avocet still here; some scaups, and a lot of lesser terns. W.; fine.

„ 21*st.*—A great many curlews, whimbrel, redshanks, curlew-sandpipers, greenshanks, an oyster-catcher, a diver, and a lot of knots and dunlins. W.; fine.

„ 29*th.*—Hundreds of birds here of all sorts. N.; strong.

1902

Mar. 9*th.*—One hundred widgeon (about), hundreds of dunlins and ringed plovers, also a large number of gulls. N.W.; strong.

„ 17*th.*—One hundred and fifty widgeon and mallard; some curlews and a great many ringed plovers and dunlins. N.W.; fine.

„ 19*th.*—An oyster-catcher here, some curlews, and many small birds. W.; strong.

„ 30*th.*—A nice lot of widgeon, some pintails amongst them, several curlews, grey plovers, and redshanks. W.; fine.

April 5*th.*—A pair of shovelers and a good lot of widgeon. W.; fine.

„ 8*th.*—Very large flock of starlings, estimate them at three thousand, on a marsh adjoining Breydon. E.; fine.

„ 11*th.*—Two hundred and fifty widgeon and some pintails. E.; strong.

„ 17*th.*—Six wild geese and a lot of widgeon to-day. S.E.; fine.

„ 20*th.*—Widgeon nearly all gone. Some whimbrel here to-day. S.W.; fine.

May 1*st.*—A lot of whimbrel, some curlews, and a few widgeon. N.; strong.

„ 4*th.*—Several grey plovers, and hundreds of whimbrel. N.; strong.

„ 6*th.*—Some terns here to-day, and a few swifts flying about; hundreds of small birds (dunlins, ringed plovers.[1]) N.; strong and cold.

„ 11*th.*—Some lesser terns and common ones, sandpipers (common), whimbrel, grey plovers, and small birds. S.E.; fine.

[1] In all probability sanderlings, occasionally small trips of Kentish plovers, and rarer birds join in with these flocks of "small birds."

May 14*th.*—A Sandwich tern and some lesser terns, also a few godwits, grey plovers, and a lot of whimbrel. N.W.; squally.

„ 15*th.*—A cormorant, and a great many whimbrel, and small birds. S.W.; fine.

„ 18*th.*—Six Egyptian geese here to-day. N.W.; strong.

„ 19*th.*—Twenty godwits, and a number of lesser terns flying against a strong northerly wind.

„ 21*st.*—This evening I watched an old heron catch and eat four eels and three flounders; he caught some more after that but threw them away again.

„ 23*rd.*—Two sheld-duck and several lesser terns. E.; fine.

„ 27*th.*—Whimbrel all gone. An oyster-catcher,[1] and several lesser terns. W.; strong.

„ 31*st.*—A spoonbill here to-day. S.; fine.

June 3*rd.*—Spoonbill still here, also a couple of swans, some mallard, also some lesser terns[2] which I think are after nesting here. N.; fine.

„ 17*th.*—A couple of tame swans and four wild geese, also some curlews. E.; fine.

„ 18*th.*—Seven sheld-ducks here to-day. E.; fine.

„ 20*th.*—A pair of shovelers and an oyster-catcher here. S.E.; strong.

„ 26*th.*—Some lesser terns and curlews. S.E.; strong.

July 3*rd.*—Several young redshanks and black-headed gulls, also young herons, to-day. N.; strong.

„ 6*th.*—Some whimbrel and curlews, redshanks and ringed plovers. S.E.; fine.

„ 15*th.*—A lot of whimbrel and curlew, some redshanks and greenshanks. S.E.; fine.

„ 23*rd.*—A great many [as last entry] to-day. N.E.; fine.

„ 24*th.*—A Caspian tern here. W.; strong.

„ 31*st.*—A great quantity of birds, also a cormorant. N.E.; fine.

Aug. 9*th.*—A good lot of birds here: redshanks, greenshanks, whimbrel, dunlins, knots, some terns and curlew-sandpipers. N.W.; fine.

„ 14*th.*—Several lesser terns. E.; fine.

[1] This bird rarely visits Breydon; when he does he makes himself conspicuous by his restlessness and noisy call-notes.

[2] See *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, p. 248.

Aug. 18*th.*—Many birds, grey plovers, curlews, and small waders; several lesser terns, the old ones catching whitebait and feeding their young [on the flats]. S.W.; strong; rain.

„ 21*st.*—A spotted redshank, several godwits, some greenshanks and curlew-sandpipers, and a number of lesser terns. N.E.; fine.

„ 26*th.*—A lot of godwit, several greenshanks, knots, grey plovers, curlews, curlew-sandpipers, and small birds, also lesser terns. S.E.; fine.

„ 30*th.*— A great many birds: hundreds of curlews, a lot of godwits, turnstones, knots, grey plovers, and many small birds, several lesser terns. N.; strong.

1903

Mar. 10*th.*—About fifty widgeon, a couple of sheld-ducks, and a great many small birds. S.W.; light.

„ 14*th.*—One hundred widgeon, two brent geese, and many small birds. S.E.; fine.

„ 18*th.*—A lot of widgeon, three brent geese, many ringed plovers and dunlins.

„ 22*nd.*—Several curlews, lot of widgeon, a few pintails, and thousands of dunlin and ringed plover here to-day. S.W.; strong.

„ 26*th.*—About one hundred and fifty widgeon and mallard, some redshanks, and many small birds. S.W.; strong.

April 3*rd.*—Several more widgeon, three brent geese, some sheld-ducks, and a couple of shovelers.

„ 11*th.*—A spoonbill here to-day; a good old bird with a long crest. W.; cold and dull.

„ 13*th.*—Six brent geese here. N.W.; strong.

„ 20*th.*—A good lot of birds about to-day: redshanks, knots, sheld-duck, widgeon, and small birds. S.E.; fine.

„ 22*nd.*—Spoonbill is still here; and many birds. E.; fine.

„ 23*rd.*—Some whimbrel, also a cormorant, and a very nice spoonbill with brown [fawn] markings down his breast and a long crest. N.E.; strong.

„ 30*th.*—The spoonbills have left. Some curlew and whimbrel and great number of small birds. S.; fine.

May 4*th.*—A great quantity of whimbrel, and a lot of old herons fishing here to-day. S.W.; fine.

„ 6*th.*—A lot of birds here now. Some grey plovers, godwits, a few terns, and scores of whimbrel. S.W.; fine.

„ 10*th.*—A spoonbill, some godwits, lot of whimbrel, and hundreds of knots, ringed plovers, and dunlins. S.E.; fine.

„ 12*th.*—["Godwit day."] A good number of birds. A spoonbill, several lesser terns, some godwits, plenty of whimbrel, and a few grey plovers. N.E.; fine.

„ 14*th.*—Two more spoonbills came to-day. W.; strong.

„ 17*th.*—Several turnstones about, and a couple of spoonbills. N.; rainy.

„ 19*th.*—A good number of bar-tailed godwits here, some greenshanks, and hundreds of small birds. S.E.; fine.

„ 20*th.*—Six more spoonbills came in to-day. W.; fine.

„ 24*th.*—Many birds, including godwit, knots, whimbrel, and ringed plovers; also the six spoonbills. N.E.; fine.

„ 28*th.*—Several whimbrel and godwits to-day. N.E.; strong.

„ 29*th.*—Six spoonbills left to-day. N.E.; fine.

„ 31*st.*—Several lesser terns, common also, and a white-winged black tern. N.E.; fine.

June 6*th.*—An avocet came in to-day, but did not stop long, after a short rest of two hours flying away to the N.E. E.; fine and warm.

„ 10*th.*—Some lesser terns, a few curlews, redshanks, and a greenshank. N.E.; fine.

„ 14*th.*—Ten Egyptian geese here this day. E.; strong.

„ 17*th.*—A lot of lesser terns, and a few godwits, and some whimbrel. N.; fine rain.

„ 24*th.*—A pair of greenshanks, I believe, are nesting on the rond adjoining Breydon; they have been about there a long time.[1]

July 1*st.*—A lot of young redshanks on the mudflats to-day.

[1] I noticed these birds for a considerable time and suspected their nesting in the neighbourhood; they were with us the whole summer, and on July 9th three others, evidently young ones, joined them on Breydon. See *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, p. 236.

July 4*th.*—Some whimbrel here now, and a few dunlins. W.; fine.

„ 7*th.*—Some common tern to-day. N.W.; strong.

„ 13*th.*—A great many young redshanks, some lesser tern, and several whimbrel. N.; fine.

„ 17*th.*—A lot of young herons here to-day.

„ 22*nd.*—Nice lot of birds: whimbrel, several turnstones, greenshanks, and small birds. S.W.; fine.

„ 23*rd.*—Number of curlews; also whimbrel, counted eighty-two in one flock. S.W.; fine.

„ 24*th.*—A spoonbill and some godwits. S.W.; rainy.

„ 26*th.*—Three black terns and lot of others. W.; much rain.

Aug. 1*st.*—An eared grebe and a lot of dunlins. W.; fine.

„ 2*nd.*—Several lesser tern and a cormorant here to-day. W.; fine.

„ 6*th.*—A number of sand-martins flying across Breydon, all going N.W. W.; fine.

„ 9*th.*—A lot of lesser terns here, all heading against a strong west wind.

„ 11*th.*—Number of lesser terns: about forty in one flock sitting on a marsh adjoining Breydon. E.; fine.

„ 22*nd.*—A great many common and lesser terns, whimbrel, knots, and small birds. S.E.; fine.

„ 27*th.*—A lot of curlews, several greenshanks, turnstones, godwits, and lesser terns, the old ones feeding the young ones with whitebait [herring syle]. W.N.W.; strong.

„ 31*st.*—Curlews, whimbrel, and lesser terns numerous. W.; strong.

1904

Mar. 11*th.*—Close to two hundred widgeon here this morning, with some curlews and dunlins. N.E.; squally.

„ 14*th.*—Some redshanks and hundreds of dunlins. S.W.; fine.

„ 21*st.*—A pair of shovelers and thousands of small birds to-day. W.N.W.; fine rain.

„ 24*th.*—Some pintails here; the widgeon are pairing off now and leaving. N.E.; strong.

„ 26th.—Six brent geese. N.E.; fine.

Mar. 27*th.*—Thousands of starlings on a marsh adjoining Breydon. An oyster-catcher on the flats. S.W.; fine.

„ 29*th.*—Hundreds of widgeon and six geese here to-day. W.; strong and squally.

April 10*th.*—A great many widgeon here yet; also a couple of scaups. N.W.; strong.

„ 11*th.*—Some grey plovers. N.; fine.

„ 12*th.*—A tame black swan here to-day.

„ 14*th.*—I saw a heron catch a large eel; when two more flew at him and they had a regular fight. Whilst they were fighting the eel got away.

„ 15*th.*—Black swan still here; a few golden plovers and some whimbrel. S.E.; fine.

„ 18*th.*—A spoonbill came to-day. E.S.E.; fine.

„ 26*th.*—Spoonbill still here, with some black-breasted [grey] plovers. W.; fine.

„ 28*th.*—Two spoonbills here, one a very good old bird. More whimbrel. W.N.W.; strong.

May 1*st.*—Scores of whimbrel, also some greenshanks and a couple of spoonbills. W.; fine.

„ 6*th.*—The two spoonbills still here, and a great many whimbrel and dunlins. W.; rainy.

„ 8*th.*—A nice lot of godwits, a couple of spoonbills, some sheld-duck, and scores of whimbrel. S.E.; fine.

„ 9*th.*—An avocet and three spoonbills. W.; fine.

„ 10*th.*—Lot of birds here now: common and lesser tern, godwits, and hundreds of ringed plovers and dunlins. N.W.; fine.

„ 11*th.*—Two avocets, seven spoonbills, with a great number of other birds. N.E.; fine.

„ 13*th.*—[Still the] two avocets and seven spoonbills; three oyster-catchers and other birds. S.W.; fine.

„ 14*th.*—[As preceding] and several turnstones. W.; strong.

„ 15*th.*—The two avocets still remain, but five of the spoonbills left to-day. E.; fine.

„ 16*th.*—The avocets left to-day.

„ 17*th.*—Four spoonbills to-day and several turnstones; some small birds. W.; fine.

„ 18*th.*—Two cormorants. W.; strong.

May 23*rd.*—Another spoonbill here; a very good old bird. W.; fine.

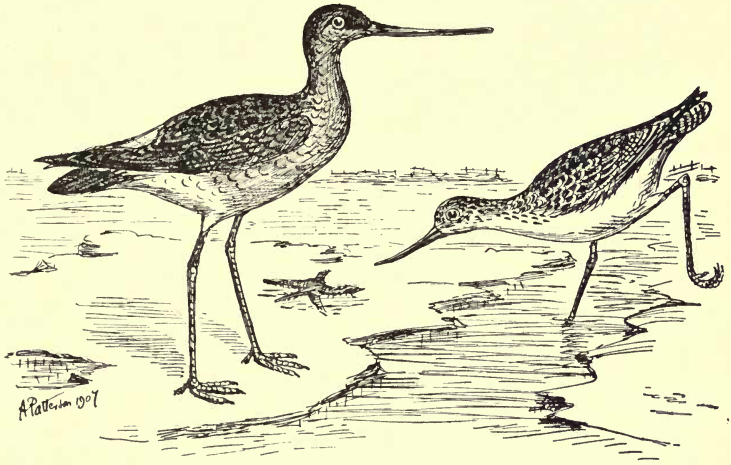
„ 27*th.*—Oyster-catcher, several grey and some golden plovers, and one spoonbill. S.E.; fine.

„ 31*st.*—Some curlews, redshanks, and an oyster-catcher. W.; fine, rainy.

June 6*th.*—Four spoonbills came to-day. N.E.; strong.

„ 20*th.*—Some lesser terns and several curlews. W.; fine.

„ 24*th.*—A cormorant and a lot of redshanks. S.; fine.



BLACK-TAILED GODWIT AND GREENSHANK

July 8*th.*—A spoonbill here, and several young mallard and redshanks. E.; fine.

„ 10*th.*—Several turnstones and a few whimbrel. S.E.; fine.

„ 14*th.*—A lot of curlews, redshanks, some dunlins and ringed plovers, also turnstones. Young birds are arriving. S.E.; fine, warm.

„ 21*st.*—Some terns, sheld-ducks, and a lot of whimbrel. E.; fine.

„ 30*th.*—Several lesser terns. S.S.E.; fine.

Aug. 3*rd.*—Seven young shovelers. S.S.E.; fine.

„ 4*th.*—A black tern about the size of a common tern *with a white rump* here to-day. S.S.E.; fine.

„ 5*th.*—Several curlew-sandpipers and turnstones. S.S.E.; fine.

Aug. 8*th.*—A lot of lesser terns and whimbrel. N.W.; fine.

„ 10*th.*—Several turnstones, whimbrel, and curlews. N.W.; fine.

„ 18*th.*—A cormorant, also some *black-breasted* grey plovers; many small birds. N.N.W.; strong.

„ 26*th.*—A good many curlews, whimbrel, knots, curlew-sandpipers, and ringed plovers. N.W.; fine.

„ 28*th.*—Several greenshanks; lot of other birds. S.S.E.; fine.

1905

Mar. 7*th.*—Large flocks of dunlins and ringed plovers. W.; fine.

„ 18*th.*—A good many widgeon, some golden plovers, and many small birds. N.W.; fine.

„ 19*th.*—First heard the call of the redshank; afterwards saw some. S.E.; fine.

„ 24*th.*—Four pairs of shovelers, a lot of widgeon, and many small birds. S.E.; fine.

„ 27*th.*—Hundreds of widgeon, a wild goose, and many dunlins. S.S.W.; fine, rainy.

April 5*th.*—Some pintails and a great many widgeon. N.W.; strong.

„ 14*th.*—Some whimbrel. S.S.E.; fine. Yesterday, S.S.E.; thick fog.

„ 15*th.*—Some sheld-duck. S.S.E.; fine.

„ 23*rd.*—First saw the swallow cross Breydon. N.; strong; squally.

„ 26*th.*—Several whimbrel and a few grey plovers. E.; fine.

„ 27*th.*—Some greenshanks. W.; strong,

May 1*st.*—Fine pair of sheld-ducks. S.W.; strong.

„ 2*nd.*—A great many varied birds; some lesser terns and common terns. S. to S.W.; squally.

„ 6*th.*—Hundreds of whimbrel here. Two pairs of shovelers. N.E.; fine.

„ 12*th.*—Some good "black-breasted" plovers and a lot of terns. N.E.; fine.

„ 13*th.*—Three oyster-catchers and several turnstones. N.E.; strong; cold.

„ 15*th.*—A black tern. N.E.; strong.

May 18*th.*—A small flock of godwits came in to-day; they seemed very tired, flying against a strong north-east wind.

„ 19*th.*—To-day I saw what I believed to be two avocets flying over Breydon. N.E.; strong.

„ 21*st.*—Oyster-catcher, also several turnstones and godwits. N.E.; strong.

„ 23*rd.*—A nice flock of grey plovers. E.; fine.

„ 25*th.*—A great many big black-backed gulls. S.; fine.

„ 28*th.*—Scores of old herons busy after eels. S.; fine.

„ 31*st.*—Many grey plovers and turnstones. N.W.; fine.

June 4*th.*—Two spoonbills flew over Breydon to-day; it was high-water at the time; there was nowhere for them to alight, so they kept going to the north-east. Fine, warm.

„ 12*th.*—Some tern. E.; strong.

„ 14*th.*—Nine avocets, seven sheld-ducks, Wind E.; freshy, as it has been some time.

„ 18*th.*—The avocets left to-day. W.; fine.

„ 23*rd.*—Some sheld-ducks and curlews. N.E.; fine.

„ 25*th.*—Lot of young redshanks. N.E.; fine.

„ 28*th.*—Two oyster-catchers and a crested grebe. S.; fine.

July 2*nd.*—Some common terns. W.S.W.; strong.

„ 4*th.*—Number of young herons here to-day. E.; fine.

„ 12*th.*—Some whimbrel and a lot of redshanks. E.; fine.

„ 14*th.*—Great numbers of black-headed gulls coming here every day from the Broads, bringing their young ones to feed on the mudflats.

„ 18*th.*—Many redshanks, a few greenshanks, several whimbrel, and thousands of gulls of all sorts; I never saw so many before. N.; fine.

„ 28*th.*—A spotted shank and a few greenshanks. N.E.; fine.

„ 30*th.*—A lot of lesser terns, the old birds feeding the young ones with "whitebait." N.W.; strong.

Aug. 4*th.*—Two big flocks of lesser terns: one flock flying against a strong west wind, which they could not hold against; it took them right to sea.

Aug. 7*th.*—A cormorant, a lot of terns and whimbrel. W.; fine.

„ 9*th.*—Many whimbrel, curlews, redshanks, some greenshanks, and lot of small birds. S.W.; fine.

„ 14*th.*—Many terns, an oyster-catcher, scores of curlews, whimbrel, and small birds. E.; fine.

„ 18*th.*—Number of common sandpipers; a flock of about twenty flew past me at dusk.

„ 23*rd.*—Some black-tailed godwits and many other birds. W.; strong.

„ 26*th.*—Still several terns here, and great numbers of other birds. W.; fine.

„ 29*th.*—Many terns, about fifty common terns in one flock; number of lesser terns. N.; strong.

„ 31*st.*—Saw a large flock of common terns early this morning flying away to seaward. N.; strong.

1906

Mar. 13*th.*—Several widgeon and some scaups here now, and large flocks of dunlins. N.W.; strong.

„ 16*th.*—A good many widgeon, some geese (brents), and a few golden plover; many dunlins. N.N.W.

„ 20*th.*—About one hundred and fifty widgeon, and some pintails; a few curlews, and hundreds of ringed plovers and dunlins. N.N.E.; very strong.

„ 25*th.*—More widgeon. N.E.; squally.

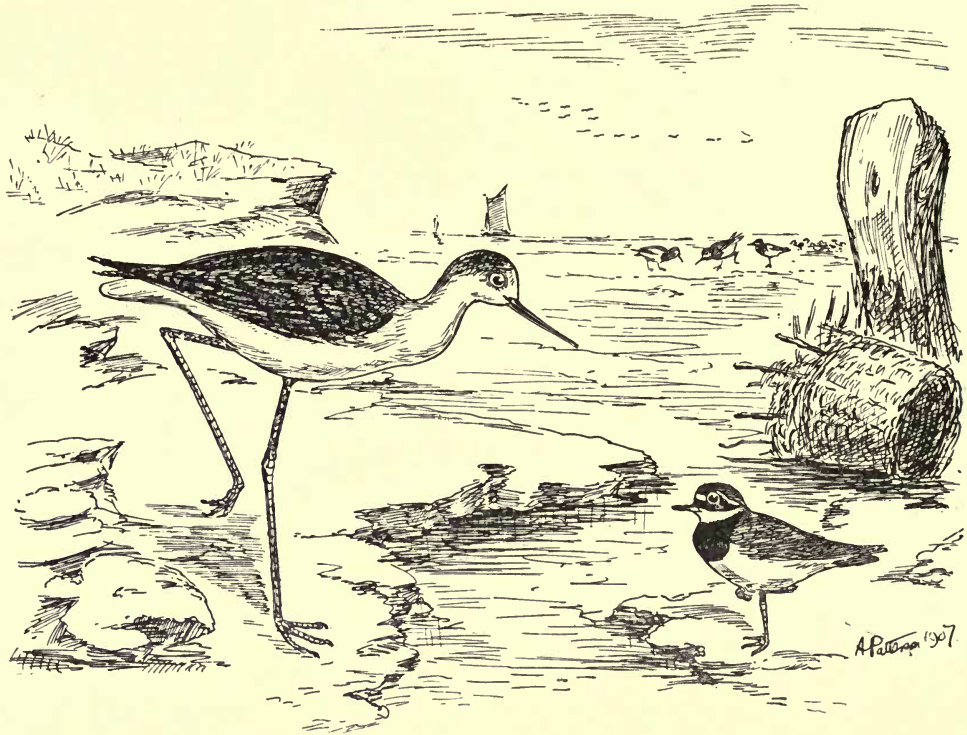
„ 28*th.*—About two hundred and fifty widgeon and thousands of dunlins and ringed plovers. N.E.; fine.

„ 31*st.*—A large flock of lapwings flying over Breydon this evening, going from south to north. Wind N.E.; fine.

April 5*th.*—The widgeon are beginning to pair. Leaving here now. Four pair shovelers this morning, and thousands of dunlins and ringed plovers. S.S.E.; fine.

„ 16*th.*—Many widgeon here yet; two thousand small birds. W.; fine and warm.

„ 17*th.*—A pair of garganey teal, also some swallows crossing Breydon; the first I have seen this year. N.E.; fine.



DIGNITY AND IMPUDENCE. STILT AND RINGED PLOVER

April 18*th.*—Some sheld-ducks here, and a lot of widgeon. W.S.W.; strong.

„ 19*th.*—Some whimbrel to-day—the first. W.; fine.

„ 25*th.*—Several whimbrel, also some grey plovers and a good many small birds. N.E.; fine.

„ 27*th.*—A small flock of godwits and several whimbrel.

„ 28*th.*—A spoonbill came in this morning and went away again at night. W.; squally.

May 4*th.*—Scores of whimbrel, a few godwits, and some pintail and widgeon; ringed plovers and dunlins by the thousand. W.; strong.

„ 6*th.*—Some lesser terns to-day and some grey plovers with black breasts. S.W.; strong.

„ 7*th.*—A lot of terns, several black terns among them. S.S.W.; fine.

„ 8*th.*—Two oyster-catchers and about two thousand dunlins and ringed plovers. N.E.; fine.

„ 12*th.*—Two cormorants here to-day. E.; fine.

„ 13*th.*—Some very pretty black-breasted grey plovers here; thirteen black terns, and several lesser terns. Weather very tempestuous.

„ 14*th.*—Some greenshanks here to-day. N.N.E; strong.

„ 17*th.*—Some turnstones and seventeen black terns. N.E.; fine.

„ 19*th.*—Several lesser terns and common terns, and a few godwits. N.W.; fine.

„ 22*nd.*—Four cormorants and a lot of old herons, also a black-tailed godwit. E.; fine.

„ 23*rd.*—Several curlews and whimbrel, some common terns, and a garganey teal which I think must be nesting close by here, as I often see it. S.E.; fine.

„ 25*th.*—Some lesser terns, a few whimbrel and turnstones. W.; fine.

June 2*nd.*—Some curlews and a great many black-backed gulls. N.; strong.

„ 8*th.*—Some curlews and redshanks. E.; fine.

„ 9*th.*—Some widgeon here still, also a pair of lesser terns. N.E.; fine.

„ 13*th.*—A couple of lesser terns, one feeding the other with whitebait; some curlews and redshanks. N.E.; fine.

June 14*th.*—A little gull and a pair of lesser terns. N.E.; squally.

„ 18*th.*—A black tern here to-day, and also some lesser terns. E.; fine.

„ 19*th.*—A lot of young herons to-day. E.; fine.

„ 21*st.*—A flock of twenty-one lesser terns. S.W.; fine.

„ 26*th.*—Common sandpipers and lesser terns. W.; strong.

„ 30*th.*—A good many young redshanks, also lesser terns. S.E.; fine.

July 3*rd.*—Some common terns here to-day. E.N.E.; fine.

„ 6*th.*—Young birds coming in numbers. Black-headed gulls, lesser terns, redshanks, also fowl—shovelers and mallard. S.; fine.

„ 14*th.*—Several whimbrel here to-day, also some big terns. N.W.; fine.

„ 17*th.*—Some large terns and some lesser terns, also a good many other birds—dunlins, curlews, ringed plovers, whimbrel, and redshanks. S.W.; fine.

„ 21*st.*—About five o'clock this afternoon a large bird came here from the eastward, a white bird with black tips to his wings and a very big beak, also a spoonbill just before dark. [I saw this bird—which was a pelican.] S.W.; fine.

„ 22*nd.*—The pelican left here this morning and went away to the eastward. S.W.; fine.

„ 28*th.*—A flock of nine turnstones and many whimbrel. W.; fine.

August 1*st.*—A flock of knots. S.W.; fine.

„ 8*th.*—Several greenshanks about to-day. S.E.; tempest.

„ 9*th.*—A little gull here, and scores of whimbrel and curlews. Many dunlins and other small birds. N.W.; rainy.

„ 13*th.*—Three sheld-ducks. S.; fine.

„ 15*th.*—A spoonbill and an oyster-catcher. W.; fine.

„ 18*th.*—Spoonbill still here, and a good many lesser terns, and a few godwits. N.; strong.

„ 19*th.*—Spoonbill went away to the N.W. this evening. W.; fine.

„ 21*st.*—This morning saw a couple of stilts flying across Breydon, going W. A young little gull here this evening, and a black tern. S.W.; fine.

Aug. 26*th.*—A good many lesser terns here yet, and several turnstones, also a black-tailed godwit. Many curlews and whimbrel. W.; fine.

„ 31*st.*—Thousands of birds here this evening. The curlews are sitting around me by the score. They will get it hot to-morrow; the gunners are very eager to get at them.

EAST COAST NOTES

CHAPTER I

SOME BIRD NOTES

ARRIVAL OF SWIFTS

THE annual arrival of the noisy swift is always, to me, one of the delights of sunny springtime, and under favourable conditions so regular is it in its movements that I look for its appearance on the 12th or 13th of May, although I have noted its advent being delayed as late as the 17th of the month. The May of 1905 was an unusually cold one, and I did not see any swifts until the 19th, when two or three pairs were to be seen in wild and noisy flight, circling around the old High Mill (now demolished). They could not have been very happy, for food must have been exceedingly scant.

On May 18th of the same year I received a letter from a gentleman living in the county, whose son wrote him the previous day from Worthing, as follows :—

"On Friday morning, 12th May, at 3.30 a.m., I saw hundreds of swifts, coming in great bunches from the sea, very high up, and going north. I was at the top of a down, Assbury Ring, 600 ft. up, and they passed very high overhead, swarms altogether, in great flocks, and lasted three-quarters of an hour, till it got quite light, and then I did not see any more."

It is rather strange that we did not receive our local contingent until the 19th; on, as recorded in my notebook, "a cold, bleak day, with a strong N. wind, and masses of damp, rugged clouds." They left us the same night, and three of them reappeared on the 23rd towards the evening. Had they returned temporarily to a warmer clime?

A Mr. Stagg, who resides near the Quay, in a house under whose eaves swifts have nested for many years, informed me that one bird visited him on the 13th, but disappeared again, and then none were seen until the 19th, probably part of the party that came to the old mill. I was very much interested in the behaviour of the "mill" swifts, which, fortunately, had reared their young ones, and seen them safely a-wing, before the mill had been so far demolished as to lay bare their particular nesting places.

I was exceedingly anxious to note the appearance of the "mill" swifts in the spring of 1906. May 7th and 8th were very fine, warm days, and probably tempted by these conditions, some swifts arrived on the 9th. That afternoon three pairs came in, and in a very excited state flew for hours around the spot where the mill had been, at a height corresponding with their old nesting quarters. Even the tall willows around which they used to catch moths had vanished, while, added to these disappointments, a bleak north-east wind set in on that day, so that they had neither food nor shelter. I saw no more of them after the night of the 9th for some days, but about twenty were flying around again in very close formation, screaming and excited, on the evening of the 28th, after which date they seem to have betaken themselves to other quarters, having found it useless to look for their old habitation, and being scared by the noise of the workmen building new houses on the spot, and the host of children at play in the old mill yard.

My earliest date of the arrival of the swift is May 4th (1891), the latest on which I have seen it being September 27th (1891).

* * * * * *

SWALLOWS AND BUTTERFLIES

In October, 1905, I wrote to the *Eastern Daily Press* as follows :—

"SIR,—Of course the swallows mostly are gone, and those few weaklings, latest hatched of the summer broods, that furtively, and with melancholy quietude hawk for the equally miserable flies which are now basking on the sunnier sides of our houses, when there happens to be a little sunshine, will

soon take their departure, to be missed less, perhaps, than they were noticed in the jolly springtime.

"I want to know this of the swallows: Has any reader observed definitely, and with assurance, any swallow, house-martin, or sand-martin deliberately hunt down and devour either a butterfly of any colour, white or otherwise, or a crane-fly (*Tipula*), that parent of the unpopular and destructive grub known as leather-jacket?

"When I was a small boy employed at a little chandlery shop, I, during one of those unaccountably magnanimous fits which sometimes take possession of young urchins, caught a wretched garden white butterfly, that was beating itself against the window panes, wondering whatever kept it from the bright sunshine outside. I tenderly brought it to the door (so unlike the ordinary boy, forsooth!) and told it to fly away and be gone. It had not reached the sill of the bedroom window ere a passing martin dashed up behind it, crumpled it up like a wisp of tissue paper, and swallowed it in a moment. Has any reader ever seem anything like it?

"JOHN KNOWLITTLE."

Replies were soon forthcoming, two or three of which were as follow:—

"SIR,—In reply to 'John Knowlittle,' I, when a boy, helping to build a haystack, used to catch a moth and throw it up as high as I could. It would then expand its wings, and a swallow would come and seize its body, while its wings would come fluttering down. I did this so many times that the birds would come within a few inches of my hand, and catch the insects almost before they could get upon the wing, so I did not always observe the wings falling. I have often since set a butterfly free in the presence of swallows, in order to observe how cleverly they separate the sapid body from the wings, but it is not always done.

"Yours etc. C. B."

"SIR,—. . . I have once, and only once, seen any member of the *Hirundinæ* hunt a butterfly on the wing, and the occasion I refer to happened on a bright summer's day, when I witnessed a swallow, high up in the air, secure with unerring aim a white butterfly, which I presume it swallowed.

"Apropos of butterflies entering into the menu of our insectivorous birds, I would like to record the following incident that came under my observation a few Sundays ago:—

"On some wire-netting surrounding a tennis-court were

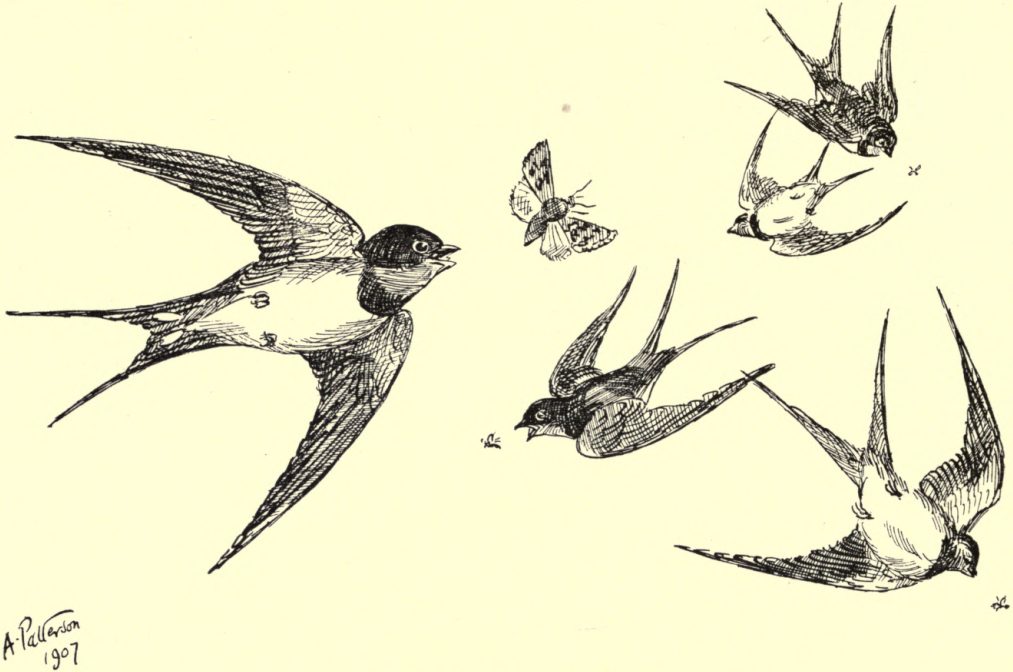
seated a pair of spotted flycatchers, with three young ones, the latter being initiated by their parents, with the aid of many practical demonstrations, into the science and art of catching insects on the wing. Suddenly there appeared on the far side of the court a white butterfly, and my interest was further aroused by the thought of what the fate of that butterfly would be, should he inadvertently come across to where the birds were sitting. I had but a short time to wait. . . . The butterfly came in a zigzag path across the lawn, and when within fifteen feet of the railings, one of the young flycatchers made a stoop at it. At first I thought he was going to be successful, but after vainly following the butterfly for several turns he gave up the chase in despair, and returned to his resting place. Without a moment's further delay one of the old birds flew at it and secured it in its first flight. Not for long, however, did she retain this much coveted *bonne bouche*, for in her return flight to the wire the butterfly escaped from between her mandibles and flew away, apparently uninjured. So great seemed the indignation and chagrin of the parent bird at the loss of prestige she had thus sustained in the eyes of her pupils, owing entirely to her own clumsiness, that she made no further effort to recapture the insect.

"S. H. L."

"SIR,—Often have I seen butterflies flying amongst swallows, and never have I seen one attacked till this year. One day this summer as I was driving, I saw a small coloured butterfly, probably a tortoise-shell, flying in front of my horse, and I was surprised to see a swallow stoop at it and devour it. It looked far too large a mouthful, but I saw no wings fall to the ground. I have spoken of the fact as a new experience, so if it be any help to 'John Knowlittle,' and if you think fit to print it, well and good. "T. D. C."

"SIR,—. . . I do not think 'John Knowlittle' could have been serious in questioning the facts of swallows taking butterflies and moths. When a boy, I have frequently spent many minutes catching large moths of a kind we called kittiwakes from the swathes of meadow hay, and throwing them up for the swallows. "J. P."

A writer in *The Countryside*, in November, 1905, made mention of the fact that when working on a building at Kessingland (Lowestoft) he had excellent opportunities of watching swallows feeding their young with "daddy long-



THE ENTOMOLOGISTS. SWALLOWS

legs." They happened to drop some, which were picked up and examined. It is just possible, from the situation referred to, that the 'swallows' may have been house-martins, but the fact that any of the *Hirundinæ* will admit the *Tipula* into their bill of fare is interesting to me, for I had long watched this species when insect hunting, specially to see if this insect was captured, but could never really satisfy myself that such was the case.

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MISTAKEN HAWKS

Various species of the smaller hawks occasionally put in an appearance during the autumnal migration, coming over with the various little travellers from "the other side." They invariably arrive hungry and eager for a meal. In the 70's and 80's it was no unusual occurrence for kestrels and merlins to dash into clap-nets, attracted thither by the struggling decoy bird fast on the "trigger." In most cases the poor thing was killed instantly, but the hawk never escaped, for the angry bird-catcher would at once pull over the nets, hoping in vain to save his decoy. And a lively time followed in clearing the struggling, screaming hawk from the thin, airy meshes. I have had several captives brought me at different times, caught in this manner.

One day a bird-catcher was "laid" on the sand-dunes for linnets and other small song birds. One of his cages was dome-shaped, the wires converging at the top, making it very much the shape of an old-fashioned crab-pot. A merlin suddenly dashed down at the bird in this cage, striking it through the wires and killing it instantly. It attempted to rise with its prey, but its foot had slipped upwards to the more contracted part of the cage. It managed, however, to flounder along some little distance before the bird-catcher could run up and secure it.

A hawk was seen by a friend of mine chasing a small bunch of starlings, which had behaved in a somewhat impudent manner to the common enemy. Presently it made a dash at one, seized it, and flew to an adjoining bank in order to settle matters with it. By some stroke of luck the starling managed to free itself, dashed away across

the river, and crouched in a crevice of a mill-sluice, where it remained fully half an hour. The pursuer patiently waited near by all that time, hoping for it to emerge, but he went away in the end disappointed. The starling shortly afterwards left his hiding-place, little the worse for his escapade, but probably a sadder and a wiser bird.

In the summer of 1899 a large hawk (doubtless a young peregrine) was seen winging its way over Breydon, when suddenly it dashed at a curlew which, seeing the bird of prey "stoop," squatted low on the mudflat and held up its long mandibles as if preparing to receive the foe, a manœuvre that seemed to have the effect of intimidating the enemy. The hawk wheeled round once or twice as if inclined to make another trial, but seeing my friend it thought the better of it and departed, much to the relief of the poor frightened curlew. I do not think the soft-tipped, pliable bill of the curlew would have been much protection to it, had the bird of prey really meant business.

In one of the corridors of Norwich Castle Museum a *stuffed* snipe, raising its soft beak to repel the onslaught of a hungry merlin, has been made to do this in a most tragic manner, the skin of the hawk having been bored by the taxidermist in order to allow the snipe's bill to be thrust in among the tow composing the body of the uppermost bird!

Some years ago a Breydon smelter observed a peregrine, near the Narrows, dash at a flock of wigeon that were feeding there. Presently the bird of prey swooped down on a fine old cock bird, which he had singled out as the startled fowl took to wing. He struck the bird, breaking its neck, and had twisted round again in his flight and seized it ere it fell into the water. The Breydoner ran up the bank dancing and capering like one demented, and he so scared the falcon that he dropped his booty, on which the man jumped into his boat and quickly retrieved it.

Some years ago a gunner named Crowther was out shooting. He fired at a coot, wounding it, when it was attacked by a hungry hooded crow. The crow, in turn, was struck at by a peregrine, which in turn fell to Crowther's gun. Verily a round of onslaughts!

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THE STARLING

The starling is a great favourite of mine. It always appears to be merry, no matter how unpleasant the weather, and it has few idle moments. It is the first bird the Breydon-side rambler puts up off the "rafts" which lie moored at the town end of the estuary, whether it is hunting in summer with the meadow-pipits for insects sunning themselves above, or small crustaceans pottering about on the heaps of wrack that the tide has floated to the ends of the huge balks, or in winter in waiting on the hooded crows for fragments of carrion overlooked by them. Fond of the company of its fellows, it is ever ready to dispute with its friends on either side of it for possession of a dainty morsel. I have seen a dozen of them that one might have covered with a handkerchief, all industriously picking up maggots from some dead animal on a refuse-heap when, even in the midst of plenty, they must needs stop at intervals to quarrel, individuals jumping quite off the ground, like fighting cocks, in passing anger, sparring in the air at each other, and then as quickly desisting, begin picking up their prey with an eagerness that suggested a suspicion of arrears of gleaning to be done and lost time to be made up. On the mudflats in autumn, when *Corophium longicorne* and *Gammaridæ* and other small crustaceans are eagerly sought, those petty disputations are not noticeable, and the flocks scatter more in hunting.

The fat, oily larvæ of the cockchafer (*Melolontha vulgaris*) are favourite tit-bits with the starlings. I have seen patches of grass in the St. George's Park riddled with holes made by the conical bill of the starling when searching for them. A spot was shown me by the park-keeper on November 7th, 1906, on which the grass grew thin and weakly—it was a favourite haunt of the cockchafer during the two or three weeks in July when they were most in evidence. Here the starlings would come at certain times "as if they knew where to find them by instinct," as my friend remarked, and without ado they would drive their bills deep into the soil, and with a circular movement worm out the fat grub and instantly devour it.

On May 27th, 1905, I observed some starlings hovering over Breydon like gulls, continually dipping and snatching up a small fly (probably *Actora*) that had perished by myriads. I have no doubt that the heavy, unsettled weather of the two previous days had caused these flies to fall into the water.

Few novices at the gun can resist a shot at a parcel of starlings; and most local gunners of my acquaintance seldom let an opportunity slip of firing into a passing flock. With us the starlings are usually wary and suspicious; but, as if knowing that they are comparatively safe when dodging in and out among the legs of cattle grazing on the marshes, it is seldom that a shot can be made at them. Consequently one can get very close to them, and can see them snapping up the insects, *Hypoderma lineatum*, and other tormenting species, for which good offices the patient animals seem sensibly grateful. If we could but persuade the starling to resist the temptations offered in autumn by ripening cherries and mulberries, I do not think the gardener would have much cause to raise a hand against this extremely useful little bird.

Its occasional consorting with the smaller gulls, and its mimicry of their methods, when fishing at the entrance of Breydon, always interest me. Fond as is the starling of shrimps and the like, which I have often observed it snatch from the shrimp-nets hanging from the boats' masts to dry, I am all but certain that it is the half-floating, half-swimming *Idotea linearis*, that long-bodied, long-antennæd crustacean, which it stoops to snatch at. This crustacean is exceedingly numerous in the finer months of the year. A starling was one day seen by a friend of mine, an excellent observer, to dart, gull-like, at some object on the surface of the river, and rising again, with the tips of its wings and toes only wetted, holding between its mandibles a struggling fish—one of the three-inch herring-fry which is often most abundant in local waters in the month of August.

That all our local starlings do not move south on the approach of winter is certain. A particular individual, with a "gamey" leg, for two years past, at every season of the year, has frequented the St. George's Park, and has attracted attention by his infirmities. He seems to be a confirmed

bachelor, for so far domestic duties have not been undertaken by him.

I observed starlings in small flocks, on the evening of July 12th, 1906, flying to the Fritton reed-beds—a rather early resorting thither to roost for the night.

THE TURDIDÆ AND THEIR FOOD

The market gardeners in the villages around Yarmouth are for ever crying out against the supposed ravages, among strawberries and other fruit, of the common thrush, the blackbird, and others of that ilk. In season and out of season they are continually shooting these birds—in the summer days because of their alleged depredations; in winter because of their remembrance of them, and for the sake of the few pence big bunches of these birds will realise in the Saturday's market. It was a fortunate circumstance, for the birds, that in June, 1897, a scourge of fruit-loving beetles (*Harpalus ruficornis*[1]) infested the strawberry-beds in certain villages lying north of the town. For a time it led to some consideration being shown to the *Turdidæ*, when it had been pointed out that they might have been useful in the thinning out of the pest, had they not been so ruthlessly killed. Some of the correspondence which appeared on the subject in the Norfolk papers fills some pages in my "Note-books," extracts from which may not be uninteresting.

The long-continued, warm, dry weather which characterised the early summer of 1897, caused great inconvenience to the various birds composing the thrush genus in the matter of food procuration. Worms, for instance, went deep into the earth for moisture; and snails, slugs, and the like left their usual haunts and sought more promising places: they for-gathered in the strawberry-gardens, finding moisture and palatable food in the ripe, luscious fruit sheltered by the broad trifoliate leaves. To these places the thrushes and blackbirds naturally repaired; and, of course, the gardeners seeing them there, and also noticing the holes bored in the ripest and biggest of their fruit, unthinkingly decided that the coming of the birds and the spoliation of their strawberries were more than a coincidence. So they began shoot-

[1] Vide *Harpalus ruficornis* in *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, pp. 293–6.

ing every bird that they could get in a line with their gun-barrels, branches being stuck up in the beds and festooned with dead birds to act as a warning to living ones. I saw many of these poor victims in all stages of decomposition; some dry and hollowed out by the larvæ of the blow-flies, others "alive" with them, and some scarcely cold from recent massacre. In an article in the *Eastern Daily Press*, I protested in strong terms against this slaughter. One writer remarked :—

"The blackbird does little injury to the strawberries, and the song-thrush none. The missel-thrush can do his share of the gathering. The worst bird the gardener has to contend with is the starling. The old birds bring their families to the strawberry plots, and when once these young rascals have obtained a taste of the delicious fruit, nothing will stop them but death. I have seen them alight within a few yards of the gunner, before the smoke has cleared away from some departed relative just fallen dead under their very eyes, and begin probing every ripe berry that lies in their way. The poor little thrush, with no thought of danger, flies up at the gardener's approach, and who, enraged at the sight of his mutilated fruit, shoots the bird that just before had been working hard at the destruction of some snail. "L. F."

"H. P." wrote as follows :—

"SIR,—I read with interest the article in your issue of to-day upon the failure of the strawberry crop at Hemsby, and I hope by its publication that horticulturists will be on the alert to adopt rapid means for the extermination of this destructive insect, commonly known as the garden weevil. It not only attacks strawberries, but other fruits and garden crops during the period of its existence. Various remedies are recommended for the trapping of the pest, and where carried out in time might prove effectual, but my opinion is that where the insects have got the upper hand (as in the case quoted) the best way would be to fork all around and between the plants, leaving the surface quite rough, and give a good dressing of gas lime. This, of course, would destroy the plants, and necessitate the land being idle for some considerable time, but surely this is better than allowing the plants to remain with prospects of worse results next year.

"I quite agree with your contributor that the gardeners have much to blame themselves for, in destroying the natural enemies of this and other insect pests. If a thrush, blackbird, or starling takes a few berries, what is that, compared

to the destruction of the whole crop by insects, which cannot be kept off by 'scaring,' as birds can, during the time the fruit is ripening?"

One keen observer of bird-life, and a large grower of strawberries, resenting the imputation made by a contributor to the correspondence, that the thrushes and blackbirds despoiled his cherry trees, remarked :—

"Song-thrushes will not eat cherries, and the blackbird's weak nerves will not allow him to do much depredation. Cherries are tackled, as a rule, by starlings, jays, and missel-thrushes. We can all manage to keep birds from our fruit if we wish without shooting them. If the missel-thrush sneaks a few cherries, his beautiful song in the bleak days of February will amply repay any but a tyrant for the little damage done in the summer months. The song-thrush will not hurt strawberries, and the wariness of the blackbird stays his beak from prying into the interior of much fruit . . . and just consider what good these birds do for us in clearing away worse foes to the fruit, such as Snail, Slug, Beetle and Co. 'Bob' redbreast and the whitethroat like currants: the former takes some shooting to frighten; he and the other do good in clearing off countless caterpillars."

Another correspondent, referring to the insect pest, stated that he had sunk in the ground a number of large jam-jars, containing lemon-water, and in this way caught beetles by hundreds.

Writing upon the food of birds of the thrush family, a correspondent in the *Field* (November, 1906) stated :—

"I have more than once seen one of the large black slugs (*Arion ater*) eaten by a thrush, once by a blackbird, and once or twice by redwings; whilst the first bird I ever remember to have seen eating this not very inviting looking creature was a rock-pipit, during a snowstorm, and I watched it consume about half of the slug before I drove it off to see what the heavy object was which it was dragging about. . . . I have frequently watched blackbirds and thrushes eat the common little white field slug (*Limax agrestis*) upon the lawn, and occasionally seen redwings and fieldfares, but all of them seem to prefer worms and shell-snails when they can get them."

The crop of a redwing shot in February was found to contain earwigs, spiders, the remains of beetles, and some

small *Helix* shells; and the stomach of a fieldfare, killed at the same time, was full of hawthorn berries. In times of extreme severity the more frugivorous fieldfare is generally in plump condition when its more omnivorous cousin is a weakly bunch of bones and feathers.

WOOD-PIGEONS' FOOD

Considering the continual slaughter of wood-pigeons, and the small number of offspring allotted to individual pairs, it is wonderful to me that not only does no sensible diminution become apparent, but, on the contrary, in Norfolk at least, the wood-pigeon more than holds its own.

Gilbert White (Letter XXXIX), writing to Pennant, remarked on its movements in large flocks, "reaching in strings for a mile together as they went out in a morning to feed." This was before the beechen woods were so much destroyed, and does not seem definitely to point to migratory flocks, although by his query, "They leave us early in the spring; where do they breed?" he undoubtedly suggests that migrants from abroad had something to do with these marked movements.

That immense numbers of wood-pigeons do come to us in early winter from "over-sea" is an established fact.[1]

The food devoured by numbers of pigeons must be immense, judging by what I have found in their crops. I have never taken the trouble to count the numbers of acorns found in them; but I have seen them taken out by the handful, and I have felt huge quantities of them when examining birds on a game-dealer's stall. In February, 1906, I wrote to the *Eastern Daily Press* as follows:—

"SIR,—I have been very much struck by the great numbers of wood-pigeons that have been brought during the winter, Saturday after Saturday, to Yarmouth market, which would seem to suggest a rather unusual abundance (locally). They are mostly a very indifferently marked lot of birds, in immature plumage, and I think a more unsophisticated and less suspicious race than our own. I have heard of some large flocks coming in from the Continent, arriving a few miles to the northward; but have not, as in some seasons, any record

[1] Vide *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, pp. 111–12.

of flights passing in the immediate neighbourhood. In some years large flocks have cast a big shadow as they crossed. Great numbers are reported in various parts of the country, notably in Devon and Bedfordshire; in parts of the latter county farmers are grumbling at the havoc they are making on the young crops. Are they in any way misbehaving themselves in Norfolk? . . . An interesting note in this week's *Country Side*, from a gamekeeper, makes reference to a strange epidemic affecting them in the woods in the south; they are being picked up dead in extraordinary good plight.

"JOHN KNOWLITTLE."

The following reply appeared in answer to my note:—

"SIR,—'John Knowlittle,' in his letter of your Friday's issue, seems just now keen on the wood-pigeon. In 'B. B. S.'s' 'Farm Notes' of Saturday, the 4th, is an article on the same bird and its habits. May I ask you for our friend 'John's' information to give an extract from the same as below?

"I learn in the district that the 'visitors,' as well as the 'home-breds,' have a strong partiality for the clover leys, and in taking their meal are careful to sample the crowns first.

"Yours truly, "MID-NORFOLK."

"'SIR,—My attention was recently called to a wild pigeon which had just been shot. In falling, this bird burst its crop, and disclosed what the shooter described as a dustpanful of the hearts of young clover plants. Multiply this dustpanful by the hundreds of birds which have been recently visiting our new leys, and some idea can be formed of the damage done by these pests. We see our clover leys looking well in the autumn, but we find no clover in the spring, and we accuse the eel-worms, which attack the roots of clover plants, of doing the damage; but perhaps the pigeons have done it after all.

"'B. B. S.'"

My own notes about that period are as follow:—

January 27th.—Many (wood-pigeons) in the market again to-day. In a note from Woburn, "M. B." says, "We have *thousands*, and they are a great grievance to the farmer. I do not understand the reason of their increase, ditto of the stock dove."

February 10th.—A considerable number (wood-pigeons) in market to-day. I felt the crops of some, and found them full of soft (green) food. The country-folk tell me they are busy on the young crops. Some stock doves also in the market.

February 13th.—Examined a lot (in a poulterer's). All had empty crops; evidently they had been shot early in the day. Examining one in the market, I found its crop filled with clover leaves.

Wood-pigeons are most saleable birds in our market, and are disposed of at sixpence and eightpence each, forming a not unremunerative item to those who sometimes expose large bunches of them for sale. I certainly do not see much for the East Norfolk garden-farmer to complain of, if added to this substantial figure he gets some interesting and even exciting sport thrown in. A fat, clover-fed pigeon is by no means bad eating.

QUAILS IN EAST ANGLIA

The *Daily Chronicle* of October 19th, 1905, was responsible for the following "par": "A quail has been shot by Sub-Lieutenant H. R. Sawbridge, R.N., at Lopham Fen. It is over fifty years since the last specimen was seen in the eastern counties."

Newspaper folks, as a rule, are peculiarly partial to that "last fifty years," and the orthodox "so many feet across the wings from tip to tip," when describing rare or curious birds seen or shot. I felt called upon to answer the statement, and wrote as follows:—

"SIR,—In your 'Interesting News in Few Lines,' you make reference to a quail shot at Lopham Fen as the last seen in the Eastern counties for fifty years. Allow me to state that several bevies of quails nested in the Broad district in 1870; and my two latest local records are: 'female shot at Scratby, September 13th, 1893; and two others near Yarmouth in November, 1899.'

"This species, which was regarded by the late Sir James Paget as 'not uncommon,' in 1834, is rare now, as it is in this country generally; and Mr. J. H. Gurney (*Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Transactions*) considers the present scarcity is due more to the captures which annually take place in the south of Europe than to any agricultural changes in Norfolk.

"A. H. P."

Other letters appeared, two of which are as follow:—

"G. T. D.," of Wimborne, wrote: "About the year 1874, I found on my shooting land a quail's nest with nineteen eggs.

These were reared; and in the 80's quails came regularly to breed on my estate in Norfolk every summer. One was seen last week in Dorset."

"My father," wrote "W. G. B.," "has frequently shot quails, particularly at Martham, in Norfolk. In fact, we have one stuffed which was killed not a great while ago."

To the *Eastern Daily Press*, in which the paragraph from the *Daily Chronicle* also appeared, Major W. S. Dods wrote :—

"SIR,—Apropos of the paragraph in to-day's *Press* stating that the quail shot at Lopham Fen was the first seen in the Eastern counties for over fifty years, let me refer you to your issue of May, 1903 ('Natural History Notes' by T. E. Gunn), who records the fact not only of a quail being shot in the previous September, but also of the finding of its nest containing fifteen eggs."

FRENCH PARTRIDGES AND SPARROWS

In my Notebook for 1905, I have the following entry :—

"*April 19th.*—About forty of these birds (French partridges) running about on the South Denes, not far from the harbour mouth." I mentioned this fact to Mr. J. H. Gurney, who wrote :—

"To my mind the chief argument against partridges found on the beach being migrants, is that, among the many hundreds of wings received from the East Coast lightships and lighthouses, there has never been a partridge's wing, nor has there ever been a house-sparrow's wing, another species thought by some to migrate."

With regard to the sparrow, I myself am confident that it does shift its quarters on occasion. I once saw and *heard* one (which is sufficiently convincing to any one who knows its note!) come in straight from sea with other small *Fringillidæ;* and on October 9th, 1906, I saw several arrive. My "note" for that date reads as follows :—

"The influx of small birds this morning made the North Denes quite interesting. At six o'clock I was at the third gate watching the incoming migrants; these birds struck the coast probably miles to the northward, and led along the nearest-east fringe of vegetation bordering the sea. I noticed every five or ten minutes, sometimes oftener, flocks of from

six to thirty birds; these included greenfinches, linnets, redpoles, twites, and, in one instance, in company with twites, common sparrows. The sparrow is always chatty on migration; and this morning he was as merry as ever. A few bunches of larks came from sea flying N.E. to S.W. It was a typical migration morning. Wind S.W. by S. at six o'clock, veering to S.S.E. by seven o'clock."

In December, 1906, I made inquiries of one or two lightshipmen respecting the coming aboard of partridges and sparrows. A mate, an intelligent man, was quite positive that on three occasions French partridges came aboard; they were secured and eaten. The English partridge he had never seen—this was on board the *Cockle* lightship. The house sparrow was quite a familiar winter visitant, coming with other small birds, and he knew it as quite distinct from the tree sparrow. When he was stationed on the *St. Nicholas* lightship, a cock pheasant once alighted on board, but the crew failed to capture him; he got away and "disappointed" them.

PELICAN

On the afternoon of July 21st, 1906, Fred Clarke, one of the Breydoners, hailed me just as I had reached my houseboat to spend the night there, and hastening to his location I found him much excited over the advent of a pelican; and there, bunched up on the edge of Duffell's drain, with his head drawn into his shoulders, and his pouch full of flounders, sat the ungainly bird, sleeping off the effects of a full stomach. Early next morning I sent my small son Gilbert with his binoculars to have a good look at him. He was in the same spot, and was busy preening his feathers and shaking his wings; not far from him stood a spoonbill. The pelican shortly after lifted himself a-wing and went direct east. I saw by a London paper shortly after that a pelican (undoubtedly the same individual) was seen at Whitstable. Mr. J. H. Gurney, writing me on October 12th, says:—

"It seems that when the pelican left Norfolk last July, it went to Whitstable flats at the mouth of the Thames, where it has been through the greater part of August and September."

I was very loth to give this bird a place in my local list,

well knowing that many of them are kept in captivity, but having regard to the long-continued prevalence of the south, south-west, and south-east winds during this phenomenally hot summer, I now consider it quite possible that this bird may have visited us from Southern Europe. Still more strongly am I impressed with the likelihood of this, seeing that notwithstanding inquiries set afoot by Mr. Gurney, myself, and probably others, no "escape" could be traced; besides, a flamingo appeared in Suffolk at about the same time, and other rare birds — glossy ibises and red-crested whistling ducks, for instance, were recorded and obtained.

An interesting note subsequently appeared in the *Zoologist* (November, 1906) referring to the pelican (*Pelecanus onocretalus*), and stating that late in October it took up its "night-quarters in the open marshes near the shore, some distance from the town (Whitstable), and when not engaged in sea-fishing roamed over the pastures, and is often seen resting on the ground among the sheep at a distance of over a mile inland. The pastures are intersected with ditches and stream-dykes, which afford the pelican food, but its almost daily habit has been to go to the shore on a fishing excursion when the tide is well out. Lately its visits to the sea have been less frequent, owing probably to the many attempts which have been made to shoot or capture it. The bird is strong on the wing. . . ." A suggestion was made that it may have escaped from a ship; but its plumage when I saw it, as early as July, did not exhibit the least appearance that would lead one to conclude this to have been the case. A pelican cooped aboard ship would in a very short time show traces of prison life.

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HOODED CROWS AND RATS

The hooded crow, as far as his behaviour in Norfolk is concerned, is by no means open to grave censure; for there is invariably enough carrion to be found on the shores of our rivers and beaches to supply his needs, and he is not tempted to resort to those predaceous habits which are said to characterise him in some localities. The worst sins I have known him commit have been laid to his charge by Breydon

gunners, who have occasionally complained of his stealing a wounded wigeon or knot from under their very guns.

In this neighbourhood he is a most industrious and indefatigable scavenger, picking up many unconsidered trifles in the shape of stranded birds, putrid fish, and other carrion. On the warrens he considers dead rabbits his lawful prey, and I have never heard any one dispute his right to them. I reported to the *Eastern Daily Press*, in November, 1905, the fact that I had discovered him busily employed at the harbour mouth skinning some dead dogfishes, first digging out the eyes, then disembowelling them, and then turning them inside out as expertly as a fish hawker turns out weevers and gurnards for the housewives surrounding his hand-barrow with waiting plates. I finished my note by asking if any reader had ever detected Master Crow skinning a rabbit. The following day a letter appeared signed by "Anopheles," who had known the bird to operate on rats. He wrote :—

"SIR, the thirst of your correspondent, 'John Knowlittle,' would seem to be insatiable when facts relating to natural history are under discussion. . . . I can only answer him indirectly by reference to the treatment of rats.

"On a frosty December night last year I was one of a party who enjoyed an excellent evening's sport, between nine and eleven, ratting around some corn stacks. As is our custom when on such expeditions—for my friends and I often indulge in this sport during the winter months—we were armed with sticks, bicycle-lamps, and a couple of keen dogs, the sticks to stir the rats out of the stacks, and the lamps to keep them in view of the dogs after they have jumped down on to the ground. Our kill on this occasion numbered between twenty and thirty rats, and these were left on the ground around the stacks, About three days afterwards I was walking past these same stacks and was surprised to find some score or more 'hoodies' busily engaged on the ground—I say surprised, because the Danish crow is not very common in the district referred to, about ten miles from Norwich. The object of their search was soon apparent, for I found, with the exception of their skins, little remained of our rats of the previous evening. They were lying on the ground as we had left them, beautifully cleaned, though turned inside out, but the skins otherwise uninjured ; and it was evident, from some of the carcase still remaining, that

the process of evisceration was commenced by the crows at the tail end of the rats. It is probable that 'hoodie' would tackle a dead rabbit in a similar manner."

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RATS—*continued*

"Anopheles" went on to discourse further on rats, remarking: "Although justly attributed a plague to the farmer in this eastern part of England (on the small estate referred to above several thousands are killed annually by the keeper), it would seem that the common brown rat [*Mus decumanus*] is not nearly so common in some other parts of the country. For example, a friend from Westmoreland told me the other day that a rat in his county might almost be reckoned a *rara avis;* it was quite an exceptional thing to meet with one. The question of food supply probably determines its distribution, and although omnivorous, the adoption of the four-course shift in this county would tend to provide him with a varied and plentiful diet at all seasons of the year."

I lived for some months in Lancashire, an adjoining county, and found the part I resided in swarming with the hated rodent. At P—— Gardens the slopes of the lake were riddled with their burrows, and they fed boldly with the water-fowl at all hours of the day. They perforated the lawn in front of the gardener's house until it was like an overcrowded rabbit burrow; they undermined the house itself. They swarmed my monkey-house at night and cleared away all that the monkeys could not stow away at supper-time. They killed foreign birds wholesale, not scrupling to devour a sick cockatoo. The only other place I ever saw so rat-infested was the slaughter-yard where (in 1890) they killed the horses for the carnivorous animals in D—— Zoological Gardens. The remnants of the carcases used then to be allowed to lie out on the concreted area to be carted away by the knacker when he came to do the next day's killing. There was little left but bare bones for him to take back with him. It seemed that a previous superintendent had been a greater admirer of rat-killing dogs than his more legitimate charges, and so the brutes were allowed a very free rein as regards their population question. I went one or two nights with a lantern to see

the gathering of the clans, and I confess I never saw anything in the rat line to equal it. The rats shot away on my coming in all directions, in a manner that I can only describe as like sparks flying from the seething hot iron on an anvil at the first heavy blow. The "super" of my time started his reign by issuing an edict against the rats, and a stone shed with rat-proof doors (?) was completed (and may still remain), and all the horses killed were at once properly "flensed" and the beef hung. The rats soon began to complain of a famine, and the first morning after the new regime had commenced I noticed that the bottom of the meat-house doors showed marks of many a score hungry rats' teeth. I set two large French wire-traps, baited with maize, that night against the doors, and in the morning discovered them *cram full* of struggling rats! If my memory serves me rightly, I captured seventy-three rats the first two nights, and for some nights after found them still as eager to enter. I hope the good work then begun has been since carried on, and that the rats are now rare in D—— Zoo.

I myself have never observed a rat afloat on Breydon on a piece of ice, but I can quite credit reports which have come to me of these creatures, pressed for food in hard winters, venturing on to the ice at night for wounded fowl, and being caught in the break-up of the ice-field which, in the lower reaches, takes place suddenly at the fall of the tide. The poor things, to be pitied in their distress, have been in sorry plight, and had a rough time of it in more ways than one when being borne seawards.

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CURIOUS NESTING SITES

On July 1st, 1897, I inserted the following note in the *Eastern Daily Press*:—

"SIR,—Birds' nests are, although I am no oologist myself, of much interest to me, inasmuch as one sees in their construction, placement, and environment, the strange workings of bird instinct which, in many cases, has been so carried out that reason, or something very little removed from it, has been added to the other quality. The predilection nowadays shown by house-martins for country residences in preference to town life is a noticeable feature. We now have in

Yarmouth scarcely a martin's nest (owing to the bullying of sparrows, etc.), but in an adjoining village seven nests new to me are this year affixed to one house front.

"Not far from Caister some swallows have been nesting annually for some years in a tea-saucer, which has been repeatedly taken down from a shelf for inspection. In the Hospital School grounds, just above the boys' heads, is a knot-hole in an old tree. Into the cavity wriggled a pair of starlings, and by some means made it conveniently comfortable to raise a family. A pair of swallows are building for the third season in the boys' lavatory within easy reach of the smallest urchin. At Caister a pair of English and a pair of red-legged partridges are nesting amicably within a very short distance of each other.

"JOHN KNOWLITTLE."

In reply to this "W. G. C." wrote as follows:—

"SIR,—Supplementing the curious nesting places of swallows published in your columns, I would mention the nest to be found beneath Aldeby Swing Bridge (over the river), continually subject to the rattling and rolling of the trains abovehead. . . . There is generally a nest in the letter-box of the ink factory at Barsham; and for many years a 'blue-jimmy' (blue tit) used the village wall-box at Kilverstone for purposes of nidification. Two or three years ago a brood of these birds was safely reared in a crack in an axle of one of the staunches of the Little Ouse. At the same time there were eight youngsters in a nest built in a crack between two bricks from which the mortar had been weathered away in a wall in Thetford. It certainly was a mystery how the plump little parent tits squeezed in. Only this year, a friend found a blue tit's nest in a hollow gatepost, and with a zeal which I thought mistaken, he slit the post down the middle until the nest was reached. In spite of this the parent bird refused to leave the eggs, which were on the point of being hatched, allowing herself to be lifted off the nest without any sign of fear. A still more curious instance of the nesting of the blue tit has been published in the *Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society*, wherein it is recorded that about 1819 a man named Camplin climbed a gibbet in the parish of Wareham, upon which had been executed a person named Bennett for the murder of his master, John Filly, the trial taking place at Thetford. In the head of the skeleton a blue tit had built its nest, and the terrified family of nine or ten flew out on being disturbed.

"In the Gallows Pits, Thetford criminals were formerly

interred. . . . Now the pits are used for depositing rubbish. Amongst the miscellaneous collection of kettles to be found there a robin generally builds its nest year by year. . . . In a railway bridge at Santon, Norfolk, six bricks had been left out of the bridge, three on either side. Of the six holes five were tenanted by starlings a few weeks ago. . . . A piece of the outer bark of a pine tree had been blown into the middle of a hawthorn, the concave side being uppermost. In this a blackbird built its nest, the run of the nest being level with the edge of the bark on either side. . . . Several years ago Mr. F. Norgate found a nest on Santon Warren, which contained eight teal's or duck's and several pheasant's eggs. . . . A piece of oak bark had become fixed on the crutch of a beech tree about three feet from the ground, and a nightjar had chosen it whereon to deposit its two eggs, rather than on the ground. . . ."

Other notes were forthcoming, proving that the two species of partridge not infrequently occupied the same nest.

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AWKWARD MOULTS

Birds usually moult at an opportune season; the wild duck, for instance, when food is in plenty, and shelter assured, and he does it thoroughly. Other birds which have to be continually on the wing take a longer period and, as a rule, do not shed too many feathers at a time, for safety and convenience sake. But exceptions occur, and sometimes disastrously. On June 30th, 1903, I was rowing up the St. Olaves' River, when I fell in with a common gull (*Larus canus*), and very speedily secured it, finding it incapable of flight, owing to a loss of most of its primaries. It was otherwise wholly uninjured. On the same date, strangely enough, another bird in the very same plight was captured on the seashore.

On September 18th, I saw a young guillemot on Breydon without flight feathers, a long way from his Yorkshire birthplace!

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THE RED-BACKED SHRIKE

Some correspondence took place in the county "daily," in May, 1896, respecting the doings of the red-backed shrike

(*Lanius collurio*), a bird which appears to be greatly on the decrease, at least in this neighbourhood. Up to the 70's it was not rare around Caister, and it nested in an old hawthorn hedge (since demolished) on the North Denes as late as 1878, in which year I watched an adult bird busy at his larder; he was feasting on a short-tailed field-mouse, and had for dessert a humble-bee or two and some beetles. He was very saucy, probably noticing I carried no gun, and he flew a short distance ahead of me, as I endeavoured to find out what other victims he had been spitting.

"WHO SAID BEETLES?" RED-BACKED SHRIKE

One writer appeared to doubt the shrike's inclination to attack animals; another replying from Haddiscoe wrote as follows:—

"Your correspondent, 'Observer,' asks if the shrike preys on small animals as well as insects. The red-backed shrike will kill small birds, and even young pheasants. It is here called the 'nine-killer,' being supposed to kill 'nine head of game,' which it impales on thorns before it commences to eat them. Several pairs visit the district in which I reside; they are very affectionate to each other, both old and young, and when grown the young ones will live and hunt with the old birds. . . . Two years ago I was in close proximity to a gamekeeper's house, not trespassing, but was on the turnpike road, when the screaming of a pair of shrikes attracted my

attention. By their actions I supposed at once they were attacking something, and soon observed them raiding a covey of very small pheasants. Their hooked beaks soon told a tale on the innocents, two of which they literally scalped within a few feet of their mother who, either with the knowledge of my presence, or fear of the shrikes, cowered down, and allowed them to do as they liked. I dared not venture into the field where the slaughter was committed, for the gamekeeper might have misinterpreted my intentions. The shrikes left their prey and, perching upon the fence, began to 'insult' me. However, I cleared them off with a few stones and proceeded on my journey."

A friend of mine living at Belton, who is an enthusiastic bee-keeper, complained to me of the nuisance some red-backed shrikes were to him. On one occasion he obtained a nest of shrikes, and placing them in a cage, hung them up in the fork of an apple tree with a view to securing the co-operation of the parent birds in their upbringing, which unaided he considered would have entailed far too much labour. The old birds discovered their young, and attended them most assiduously, constantly bringing lizards, mice, wasps, butterflies, humble-bees, and some of his own! The floor of the cage, he assured me, was "strewn with muck of that sort," many scarcely hurt, which crawled and fluttered about the cage "like a menagerie"! He was so impressed with the need of so large and varied a supply that as soon as they were sufficiently fledged to fly he let them go, afterwards wishing he had not, for they set their affections so strongly on his bees that, had he not "turned to and shot 'em," they would have devastated his hives.

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TEMPERATURE AND FEATHERS

St. John[1] appears to have noticed the effect of severe cold on the plumage of the snowbunting: "Scarcely," he says, "any two of the snowbuntings are quite alike. In the first flocks that come there are only a few which are light-coloured, but as the snow and frost increase the white birds became more numerous." The same remarks apply to those I have noticed in this neighbourhood. In sharp weather with much

[1] *Sportsman and Naturalist's Tour in Sutherland*, p. 189.

snow they keep more to the sand-dunes on the coast; in rough but open weather they are found on the marshes, and by the banks of the rivers and on Breydon. Our bird-catchers have a notion that the whiter birds are the males, and dispose of them as such.

I noticed in the very winterly January of 1891, that a great many of the common snipes shot had become exceptionally light-coloured, greatly reminding me, at the time, of specimens faded from being exposed to too strong a light.

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WILD GEESE

The visits of wild geese to this neighbourhood are, with the exception of those of the brent goose, very uncertain, and I am inclined to think, having regard to local conditions, that they must always have been so, at least for centuries. In hard winters, with prolonged snowstorms, brent geese are not uncommon off the coast; but the other species are irregular in their visits, and like the brent, these depend greatly upon stress of weather. But the most curious thing respecting them is that one particular species seems always to predominate in numbers. During December several odd birds are shot, in one instance three were killed on Breydon by a punt-gunner named Fred Clarke: they were all bean geese (*Anser segetum*). One year pink-footed geese (*A. brachyrhyncus*) will be ascendant; another, white-fronted geese (*A albifrons*).

During the second week of March, 1904, six brent geese put in an appearance on Breydon, and made themselves very much at home; it being close season they remained undisturbed. They found much to interest them among the *Zostera marina*, and stayed with us until April 16th, on which date I saw them marching about the flats. Whilst watching them from the bank I observed some boys who were winkling, and who, attracted by their apparent tameness, walked in their direction as if to see how near they could approach them. This the geese resented, and finding the place getting too lively for them, they took to wing and, mounting high in the air, turned and flew away in an easterly direction, and did not afterwards return. This was quite an unusual period

for their visiting us. Unfortunately, added to the rarity of their appearance, they are such a desirable prey, that gunners are soon after them, and a study of their habits becomes impossible.

On June 7th I received a postcard from Oulton, which ran as follows :—

"DEAR MR. PATTERSON,

"I have observed for many years small parties of wild geese migrating over here during first week of June. Yesterday they came as usual, quite low, and alighted on the marshes. What are they, and whence? One year I identified bernacles; curiously enough geese are never seen here regularly at any other time. "W. S. E."

I replied to "W. S. E.'s" communication, and he again wrote, on June 29th :—

"DEAR MR. PATTERSON,

"I thank you very much for your letter of yesterday, but you do not seem to have caught the point of my last.

"I should never have thought anything of seeing geese in June casually, but I have observed three small skeins pass over from north to south for forty years, always about the *same date.* I originally thought they were brents, as in 1869 half a dozen passed within thirty yards of me; but since then I have twice identified bernacles; and this twice are the only occasions I have ever identified bernacles in Norfolk and Suffolk at any time of the year. Forty years ago pink-footed were commonest, and fed regularly in winter on Barnaby marshes, but of late years what few geese are seen about here are mostly *Frontinacs.*

"Another great change is occurring, teal are becoming so scarce that if it continues they will soon become extinct. There are a few breeding in the centre of Norway still where I shoot, and on the top of a moderately low mountain, where snow melts by mid-June, and does not lie again thereon until late September, I find in late August golden plover and dotterel to have bred there."

"P.S.—A moorhen last week made an apology of a nest on the cover of one of my boats moored in the reeds here, and laid three eggs. On Sunday I got an old basket, covered it with dead rush and made her quite a natural nest on top, placing the three eggs therein. Within an hour (11 a.m.) she laid a fourth egg on the boat cover and pulled the eggs out of my nest, breaking one, which I consider an extraordinary action on the moorhen's part. "W. S. E."

BIRD EXTERMINATION

The following facts are written without comment. The reader may place what construction he chooses upon them.

On September 4th, 1906, thirteen ducks were observed to come in from seaward and alight on the north-west side of Breydon. An amateur puntsman named Youngs, who was lurking under the walls hard by, immediately sculled after them, and got a charge of B.B.'s into their midst with telling effect. Nine birds were killed or maimed, and although they had on arrival appeared tired and remarkably tame, the wounded ones, by diving and the use of their wings, gave him an arduous half-hour in retrieving them, by doubling after them, and by the use of his shoulder-gun. One bird, spoiled by decapitation for a "specimen," was eaten by Mr. Youngs; the other eight were sold to Mr. Saunders, a local taxidermist. A tenth wounded bird managed to reach the marshes, but was soon after picked out of a ditch by a marshman named Dan Banham, who ended its career in the oven. I called on Mr. Saunders on the 5th, and saw four birds still in the flesh, four having already been made into skins. They were unmistakably red-crested pochards (*Netta rufina.* Pallas). They were, of course, by no means so distinguished in appearance as birds shot in nuptial dress; the plumage, to my mind, greatly resembled that of an adult female smew; and, indeed, the general contour of the birds was slim and rakish, like that dainty little creature. The white shoulder-patches, and that of the lesser wing-coverts, secondaries, and primaries, were very conspicuous. The toes of six of the birds were Naples yellow, with a suggestion of redness, the webs being blackish; these were males. The other two had greenish tinted toes. I suggested these were females, and this proved to be so on dissection. The cap was reddish brown, and the beak scarlet-lake. We had a look at the windpipe, and were much struck with its peculiarities of conformation. I made a rough water-colour sketch of the best bird, and obtained three large parasites (*Trinotum luridum*[1]) which, under the microscope, look hairy and for-

[1] On my forwarding these parasites to Mr. R. Hancock, of Birmingham, he identified them as *Trinotum luridum*, one perfect, the other two in varying stages of growth. He informs me that this parasite has been found on the wigeon, golden eye, pintail, teal, smew, and goosander.

bidding, their general appearance suggesting much tenacity of purpose. Had I been earlier, Mr. Saunders remarked, I could have had more, and been welcome to them, for they made things lively for him for a time.

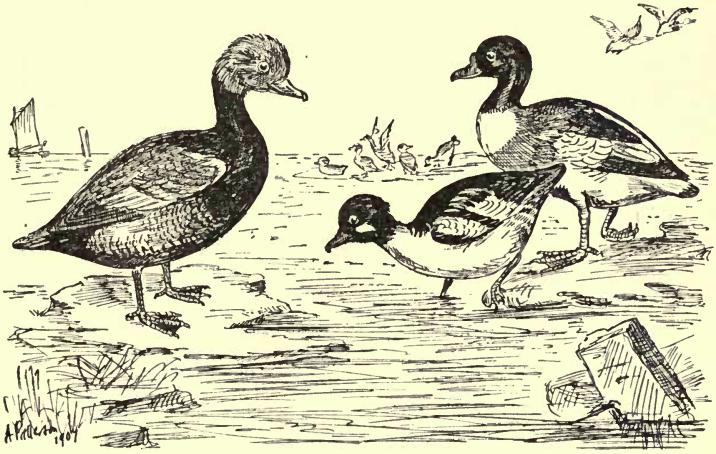
According to the *Field* of September 15th, two birds of this species were shot on the 8th on Hickling Broad by Alfred Nudd, a keeper, a duck being secured, but the drake was not recovered until two days later, and was consequently spoiled (I believe by rats). In all probability these belonged to the same flock. Mr. J. H. Gurney, in suggesting the likelihood of the heat-wave (then prevailing) having brought them hither, remarked that, at any rate, "the poor things met with a *warm* reception." The prevailing winds had for some time been southerly.

So far one bird had not been accounted for; but information reached me that a second wounded bird had been found in a ditch near James Banham's farm; and I was assured by Banham that his lad recovered it, and his wife brought it to Yarmouth market the following day, where it was sold to a man named Docwra for ninepence, for eating. Both Docwra and Banham independently gave me a description of the bird, which quite satisfied me that it was a crested duck, the former expressing his regret at cooking it, having already been made acquainted with its rarity, and probable value as a "specimen." I ate one carcase, and found it as delicious a duck as I ever drew out of an oven.

A few days later I was assured by a punt-gunner, who saw Youngs shoot the birds, that there were eighteen, and not thirteen only; and shortly after I found that a Mr. Boning had killed two at Hickling on October 18th, a male, in a very forward change of plumage, being secured; the other was lost. I saw this bird at Saunders'; he had set it up exactly like the one in the illustration in Howard Saunders' *Manual* (p. 441). The head had assumed its red tints, save for a streakiness still observable at the margins; and the black of the breast was still somewhat spotty with grey. I was astonished at the quick change exhibited.

Four glossy ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*) were seen on Breydon on the morning of September 4th. They appeared to be very tired, and presently alighted on the marshes. The wind was south, and my diary records the day as "fearfully

hot." In the morning I saw the gunner Youngs, already referred to, in a somewhat excited state; he had seen them, and threatened to run up in the afternoon to secure them, if possible. He did not, but, as already narrated, he fell in with the red-crested ducks instead. The ibises remained in the neighbourhood for some days, but got away unscathed. But they were fated not to escape the vigilant eye of the gunner. On October 19th Mr. J. H. Gurney wrote me as follows: "The four glossy ibises have all been accounted for,



RED-CRESTED WHISTLING DUCK, GOLDEN EYE, SHELD-DUCK

three in Ireland and one in Sussex; so their peregrinations are over."

Two red-throated divers (*Colymbus septentrionalis*) made their way to our neighbourhood in October, 1906, attracted thither, no doubt, by the inshoring of the herrings. An old shore-gunner of my acquaintance, who is a keen shot, went after them. One day he killed one of them, and the bird was shown me. It had the red on the neck prettily mottled and streaked with grey. A few days after this same gunner slew the other, which had kept in the neighbourhood. I also saw this, and was astonished to find it entirely minus the flight-feathers (primaries), which were the merest soft stumps possible; and a margining of white fluffy down marked the outside of the secondary feathers. Did this bird moult in this neighbourhood? or had it never as yet assumed its

primaries? If so, it had travelled a long way from its native shores, and must have performed the journey by swimming, and drifting with the tides. It was as fat as a mole; and in event of bad weather or an easterly gale must inevitably have become tired out and come to grief. These birds have a steady and well-sustained flight; one that I got fairly close to on October 13th, 1906, before it saw me, took to wing with the alacrity of a duck, and flew a mile in an undeviating flight before settling on the waves again.

In April, 1903, a remarkable invasion of the ferruginous duck (*Fuligula nyroca*) occurred in the neighbourhood, the more noticeable from the time of the year and the singularity of their being mostly males! Mr. J. H. Gurney thus refers to their advent in the *Zoologist:* "It was during April that Mr. Patterson announced in the *Field* that there had been a notable visitation of the nyroca or white-eyed duck. They either came in or divided themselves into two flocks, which together amounted to twenty, one flock going to Rollesby Broad, the other settling, on the 15th, on Hickling Broad, where these strangers only too quickly attracted attention. The presence of such a large number of this rare duck at one time in England is curious, and it is to be regretted that they were not fully protected, and that some persons who ought to have known better molested them. . . . No such appearance of nyroca ducks has been put on record in East Anglia before, and it is to be feared there is little inducement for any to come again." Four were seen at the same time in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

As Mr. Gurney said, these strangers soon attracted attention; but as it was close season (!) accounts of what happened to them only leaked out in interested circles. The ducks were unfortunate in visiting a part of the Broadlands which is *most strictly preserved*, and, from what I learnt afterwards, *they were well looked after* by those who hold the exclusive right to shoot over these particular portions of the Norfolk Broads. I think I can truthfully state that they shared the self-same fate meted out to the red-crested ducks, and were "preserved" as effectively! Our local sportsmen hold the theory that, as strange birds are but the merest stragglers to our shores, their slaughter cannot much affect the race; and furthermore they have an axiom "that if we don't shoot them, somebody else will."

TO EXTERMINATE A SPECIES!

To show my utter disgust at the methods pursued by so-called naturalists, I publish a letter which shows how, for paltry pelf, a rare and beautiful British bird may be pursued to its utter extinction. It is well known that this true Britisher, the bearded tit, has a very limited habitat to-day, and but for the efforts of some enlightened folk to preserve it, might soon become as extinct as the dodo.

"S——Y, *April* 6, 1892.

"DEAR SIR,—Could you get me bearded tits in the flesh? Can give you 3s. 6d. each. Also nests and eggs of same. If at any time you can offer pied or albino birds, shall be glad to hear from you.

"Yours ——,

"—— ——."

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HOOKED BIRDS

It is not a rare thing for guillemots to be hooked by sea-anglers fishing from piers and breakwaters; and catching gulls by means of baited hooks was by no means unknown amongst the smacksmen in the 70's and 80's, when smacking was one of Yarmouth's chief industries.

A very lively sporting adventure occurred on one of the Broads some years since, when the late Captain Burch and the late Fielding Harmer were pike-fishing with live bait. During a few minutes' inattention, while they were busy at something on the floor of the boat, the float and line were taken into the reed-clump, and a violent commotion ensued, the loose line becoming woefully entangled in the reeds. The anglers thought they had certainly hooked an exceedingly lively jack; but when they had set matters pretty straight again and the "catch" came into view, they were greatly astonished to find that they had foul-hooked by the leg a miserable coot!

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HYBRID DUCKS

From time to time I have met with, on the poultry stalls, hybrid ducks that had been shot in the neighbourhood.

Some ducks hailing from Mautby decoy, of a very dark variety with a white bar on the wing, which made them easily distinguishable as belonging to the same brood, were killed at various times. Undoubtedly they were the offspring of a wild mallard and a strangely coloured tame duck. Crosses between the mallard and gaily marked tame fowl were by no means rare at one time, and were distinguished by the name of marsh ducks.

When walking up and down the ranks of Yarmouth market, on January 20th, 1906, as is my usual custom on Saturdays, during the shooting season, in search of any interesting fowl that may turn up, I was attracted by an odd-looking duck hanging with a mallard on a stall. On closer inspection I found it to be a remarkably pretty hybrid between a mallard and a black East Indian duck. The head was glossy greenish black, as was the back. Underneath the bird was a patch of white, with another spot of white on the "throat," and the breast was a dark brown. The black feet were small, the toes only showing a brown streak, and the black, upper mandible was relieved by a light brown patch on either side. The bird was in fine condition, and undoubtedly a male. I should have purchased it for the Tolhouse Museum, but the good woman "couldn't for the life on her" say the price of it, as her husband had not "set the figger."

Her Grace the Duchess of Bedford, to whom I mentioned this incident, replied: "Crosses between common mallard and black East India ducks are common whenever they are kept together. We have them here [Woburn], and I have seen them at Lord Portsmouth's place in Hampshire, and in Scotland on the Tay. . . ."

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SCAUP DUCK

The scaup duck (*Fuligula marila*) does not often put in an appearance here until driven in by hard weather, from which circumstance it is known as the "hard fowl." For some unaccountable reason, unless there had been some rough weather "farther north," a decided migration of this species was observed in the neighbourhood in October, 1898.

I saw over thirty on Durrant's poultry stall on October 8th. He had received forty-four by the 10th, and I saw six on a countryman's stall on the same date. Mr. J. H. Gurney reported in the *Zoologist*, referring to the 10th: "Received three live scaup drakes from Saham decoy cage, and about the same time there was a sudden abundance of them at the mouths of our rivers and similar places." Several were reported from various stations in the country. At the same time many wild swans, in most cases believed to be Bewick's swans, were observed in different parts of the county, their tameness pointing to their having made a long journey, possibly under wearying conditions. Mr. Gurney wrote me on the 14th that "the number of scaup ducks is certainly very remarkable, and I expect to hear of some more greater spotted woodpeckers." On November 10th Mr. Gurney gave me the total of scaups obtained as seventy-seven. On the 1st of November I sent him an example, which was reported in the *Zoologist* as follows: "A female scaup, in a very rufous state as regards breast, neck, and head, received from Mr. Patterson, had probably acquired that ferruginous colour from feeding in water where there was oxide of iron. It had been shot when making its last meal, for several *Cyclas cornea* (identified by Mr. Reeve) were in its gullet. On showing it to Mr. Caton Haigh," wrote Mr. Gurney, "he said that he had seen one as rufous." (Cf. *Birds of Norfolk*, III, pp. 78, 190.)

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HERONS AND FISHES

In February, 1895, a "sportsman" killed four herons in two shots, and his exploit went the rounds of the county papers, including the *Eastern Daily Press*. The following day appeared a note, signed "S. S. G.," which read as follows:—

"SIR,—I heartily congratulate Mr. C—— on having killed four herons in two shots. These birds, besides being detrimental to sport, consume in this country tons of human food daily, and do no good whatever."

A note followed from "An Old Sportsman," who said:—

"I do not agree with those who say that herons are 'not

fit to eat.' When they are stuffed with bacon and well larded they are as good as a swan. In olden times they were eaten by royalty, and why not by common folk now?

"If any one who is a preserver of fish can say a word in favour of the heron, now is his time to speak, for many are being shot. I should as soon think of preserving rats or sparrows, as I am not aware that herons do any good, and they certainly deprive the quiet angler of no end of sport, and sometimes of a good dinner."

I replied to these rather extravagant epistles to the effect that "I know the wary old hernshaw well . . . and have often watched him adroitly catching shore-crabs, young eels, and small flounders, or any such little fry as comes to hand. Most of the fish he devours are the valueless fry of our more despised fishes. Who eats bream, roach, perch, and such coarse fish? Certainly not the anglers, who themselves haul out tons yearly to rot and feed the flies and rats upon our river and broad sides, thinking, wisely too, that they are not worth the carrying home. On the other hand, he weeds out, and possibly prevents overcrowding. I will grant the heron may be a bit of a nuisance in the neighbourhood of a trout stream, but on the whole he is a fellow whom I should be sorry to see exterminated."

The correspondence rounded up with an editorial comment:—

"The hero of the herons has found his champion. 'S. S. G.' congratulates him on his marvellous feat of destroying four herons in two shots. The virtue of the deed lies in the fact that 'herons are detrimental to sport and consume tons of human food daily.' One would like to ask what detriment herons are to sport? Do they so diminish the fish that the angler has to pass weary hours of disappointment instead of hilarious excitement at the capture of his scaly victims? When I read of the doings of the hundred and one angling clubs in the city [Norwich], I can but demur to the statement that sport is injured. As to the 'consumption of human food,' does the correspondent mean the fresh-water fish which the herons get from dykes and streams? If so, I would like to ask how many tons of so-called 'human food' do the anglers destroy in the course of a season? Herons were formerly preserved for the sport of falconry. They have now so diminished that their wanton destruction is little less than a crime."

* * * * * *

HERON *v.* "ANSWER"

In October, 1906, some most interesting correspondence appeared in the *Eastern Daily Press*, having reference to the common heron (*Ardea cinerea*).

A short letter, dated October 9th, read as follows :—

"THE HERNSHAW?

"DEAR SIR,—There is a bird about here called an 'answer.'

"It's a bird with long legs and long neck, and is the colour of slate.

"Is it its right name, or is it that what they call it in Norfolk?

"Will you, please, tell me its right name?

"I remain, etc.,

"C——, NORWICH." "V. J."

An editorial comment accompanied this note to this effect :—

"Our naturalist readers will be interested in hearing of a new piece of local nomenclature. . . . One would imagine that anybody sufficiently interested in birds to write on such a point would know a heron when he saw it, and evidently, judging by his brief but sufficient word-picture, our correspondent has seen it. A young heron is a heronshaw, corrupted in general use into hernshaw, and applied to heron young or old. It is our correspondent's delightful shot at Norfolk pronunciation that makes 'answer' of it. It occurred to us at first that he must have been chatting with some learned person, who could not refer to a goose without latinity; but the long legs and long neck and slate colour reveal the heron. 'Answer' is distinctly good."

From among several other letters I have selected two or three :—

"SIR,—The correct name of the bird that Mr. J—— describes . . . is the 'heron.' This bird is common in these marshy districts, and is often seen to dive into the river for fish, which is its chief food. "B. C."

"SIR,—The local term for a heron, generally called 'hanser,' no doubt derives its origin from Shakespeare. Hamlet says in Act iv. Scene 2, 'I know a hawk from a handsaw,' and this has been corrupted into 'hanser.' It is not often our Norfolk people drop their H's. "H. L. C."

"SIR,—Has not your correspondent heard the following rhyme?

"'I ha' seen the roses in blow,
I ha' seen the wilets blew;
I ha' seen the "hansie" fly ever so high,
But I niver see nothin' like yew!'

"YOKEL."

"SIR,—What Shakespeare put into Hamlet's speech was doubtless, 'I know a hawk from a hanser,' meaning, I know the pursuer from the pursued, or to paraphrase the sentences, 'I know a hound from a hare!'

"In Shakespeare's day hawking was greatly followed, and the heron or hanser was the most coveted quarry. The copyist clearly went wrong, and not knowing what a hanser was, substituted the word handsaw.

"One player went so far as to imitate sawing. John Kemble read the passage 'I knew a hawk from my hand, sir,' which he held up. He evidently did not know the vernacular for heron or heronshaw, but saw that handsaw was nonsense.

"J. B."

Taking exception to the first reply of 'B. C.,' I replied as follows:—

"SIR,—The letter of 'V. J.'s' was a fair knock-out. There was something so unassumingly honest yet naive about it that it was refreshing. . . . I did not intend entering the lists until Mr. C. asserted that the heron 'dives' into the river, an acrobatic feat he never indulges in. I have seen scores of 'answers' fishing for eels and flounders on Breydon, but he never goes more than thigh-deep in search of them. At high-water he haunts the top or edge of a flat; at low, he wades up and down the drains. On seeing a fish he strikes at it, sometimes going the whole length of his neck under, having just sufficent length of that extremity to correspond with that of the others. Rarely 'answer' misses his footing and slips into deep water off the edge of a flat, and a right lively confloption he usually makes to right-side himself again, although he will sometimes unconcernedly start swimming. True, he lives principally on fish, but he accounts for many water-voles, and would get more if opportunity offered, besides other vermin.

"JOHN KNOWLITTLE."

* * * * * *

SEA-GOING PIGEONS

A remarkable instance of tame pigeons making daily visits to a lightship came under my notice early in January, 1906. Some eighteen months before, a pigeon, in hazy weather, made its appearance on the *St. Nicholas* lightship, which is moored a mile and a half from the town. It was fed and, being unmolested, rested awhile and, on the weather brightening, flew back to the shore. Not long after it voluntarily returned to the ship, was fed again, and once more went home. It learned to recognise the tin in which some corn was kept, and would soon come aboard when it saw the "signal" flashed by the holding up of the tin above the bulwarks. Shortly after another bird, somewhat shyer, ventured on the trip with it, and was made welcome; in time, no fewer than five birds made it a daily practice to honour the delighted seamen with their presence. They did not all seem related, although two were probably young birds belonging to the first pair. They always alighted first on the davit-guys, and then descended to the deck to feed, after which they flew away home for the remainder of the day.

On my button-holing the mate of the *St. Nicholas*, in December (1906), he assured me that the birds still visited the ship, and that sometimes as many as *ten* flew aboard!

* * * * * *

THE DRUMMING OF THE SNIPE

That there should have been so much dispute as to how the common snipe produces his nuptial drumming in the merry springtime, has always seemed to me to be a rather curious thing. I must confess that the subject did not appeal much to me, for Breydon, with its more interesting migrant wildfowl, has always absorbed my leisure time in the earlier half of the year. But one Sunday afternoon in April, 1906, a male snipe at Herringfleet so forced himself on my notice that I determined, if possible, to satisfy myself once and for all upon this phenomenon. A strange, buzzing sound, very much like that produced by rapidly twirling in the air a notched stick made fast to a piece of string—a toy well known to boys—attracted my attention. Hiding myself behind a

scrubby tree, and bringing my glasses to bear on the strange musician, I noticed that the sound was always produced when the bird, turning suddenly at the highest part of its flight, pitched downwards, and manipulated his wings with greater rapidity. Again and again I saw him turn, and as often the drumming was repeated, and I felt quite convinced that it was no vocal production.

On July 12th I was at Belton, chatting with a native in his garden, at the edge of a small fen bordering on the marshes. Brookes, the said native, is a semi-naturalist, half a sportsman, general carpenter and factotum of the village, and a good observer to boot. He pointed out a dead tree, to the bare topmost bough of which, twenty feet from the ground, *with wings fluttering*, and head poised at half a right angle, a snipe repeatedly resorted to drum; "the noise," he emphatically assured me, "coming from the throat!" Quite a number of snipes nest yearly on the marshes between his place, near the railway station, and the Burgh "walls." He had seen a snipe vibrating its wings and drumming, when poised, on the topmost sail of an adjoining mill. He would hear nothing of a possibility of his seeing one snipe in such a situation, and hearing others drumming on the wing at the time.

In a note to the *Eastern Daily Press* I asked for information on this point, and shortly after secured the following letter on the subject:—

"COLTISHALL, NORWICH, *Oct. 12th*, 1906.

"DEAR SIR,—I see you raise the question, in your letter of to-day in the *E.D.P.* as to the drumming of the snipe. It is a very vexed question, though I have not much doubt in my own mind about its being the combined action of the wings and tail.

"I had a splendid opportunity some years ago of observing the operation. I was standing under a small tree on the marshes, near Belaugh, when I heard a snipe drum. It evidently did not see me, as it made its dive some five or six times, coming down within thirty feet, just over my head, and I distinctly saw what I have never seen in any picture, or in any description, that at the base of the tail, which was fully expanded, a sabre-shaped feather was standing out [on either side] at right-angles. I am not sure, at this distance of time, whether the curved part was in front or not. The wings were half-closed and vibrating very rapidly, which would

naturally increase the draught of air for these feathers, which, I believe, are the principal factors in causing the sound. You can easily find the feathers, as they are a different shape to the others; if you kill a wounded snipe, by pressing the breast and back, you can generally see them move out sideways slightly. "Yours faithfully, C. W. A."

[A sketch of the tail and these particular feathers was inserted in the letter, and on examining a snipe I noticed them as described.]

Still pursuing the subject, I wrote to an old sportsman living at Oulton Broad, who promptly replied as follows:—

"OULTON BROAD, *November 9th*, 1906.

"DEAR MR. PATTERSON,

"In response to your post card, if on a summer's evening you watch a snipe through powerful glasses in mid-air, you will observe him fly upwards, bleating in a natural manner, then suddenly throw himself on his side, draw up his tail to a right-angle, and even more acute than that, and fall rapidly head first towards the earth, beating rapidly with his wings. Hence, in some districts, the action is called bleating, and in others drumming, from his wing motion.

"The late Mr. Edward Poyser, who was a good naturalist, told me that he had a snipe stuffed with its tail spread out in this position, and that he succeeded, by forcing air rapidly through it (imitating as far as he was able the wind that would come from the action of the snipe's wings), in producing the drumming sound. . . . I have very little doubt that this is the manner in which the sound is produced.

"Yours truly, W. S. E."

* * * * * *

AVIAN DISCORD

Small wading birds are peaceably inclined. The struggle for existence leaves little time for disputation on the margin of the retreating or the incoming waves; and their love of society is, in most of the species, notorious. The ringed plover not only tolerates the company of the dunlin, but himself gratuitously forces his presence into the midst of a busy flock. It is only at the time of nesting that the ringed plover ever resents intrusion from others, but himself is then inclined to seclusiveness. Gulls, more particularly the larger

kinds, will pursue each other and fight in mid-air over a coveted morsel that the original finder failed to swallow on the instant of his luck. It is usual for starlings to harass a kestrel flying across the marshes, and nothing uncommon for a parcel of angry finches to mob a cuckoo. Sparrows will fight and scuffle at certain times like fighting-cocks, and pull feathers off each other's heads. On one occasion I witnessed a remarkable scrimmage on the Bure marshes between some starlings and a "bunch" of common sandpipers. There was much squealing and a great show of anger; but I did not see the finish of it, for the wading birds beat a retreat, their assailants pursuing them. What two utterly distinct races of birds like these could find to quarrel over would be hard to say. A heron and a gull engaged in fierce combat one day on Breydon; the heron seemed glad to beat a retreat, while the gull received a nasty wound in its breast from the heron's vicious bill-thrusts.

It may be that these feelings and actions of opposite characters are referable to accidents and emergencies, arising from jealousy and rivalry, probably due to aggression and resentment; while sometimes fears for the safety of their young make birds quarrelsome. One August morning, in 1895, I saw a "rare to-do" between a swarm of swallows and a kestrel, the latter having been caught hanging around one of the mills, as likely as not in search of field-mice on the marsh, although it is just probable that some weakling swallow had attracted its attention. The redbreast is quarrelsome enough in winter, and particularly objects to intrusions on his territories, driving away with vigorous assault any newcomer where food is scattered for him. I once placed four in a cage, but would not repeat the experiment. On the following morning one lay dead on the floor of the cage; another lay there next day, and yet another on the following morning. The victor seemed quite proud of his conquests, and I let him go.

The pursuit and robbing of gulls by skuas can hardly come under the heading of discord, for it is a recognised part of their natural economy; too lazy or too incompetent to engage in honest fishing, the skuas impose a kind of avian income-tax with a persistency and vigour that suggest a power to fish for themselves, if they choose to do so.

CURLEW-SANDPIPER AND GODWIT

In the autumn of 1898 I saw a poor little curlew-sandpiper running about on the mudflats, one of its wings having been badly damaged by a gunshot. After a rather exciting chase over the mudflats I secured the bird, bound up its wing, and placed it in an empty rabbit hutch. Next morning I found it extremely hungry, and quite ready to consume a number of wood-lice (*Onisicus*) and small worms I hunted up for it. In less than a week it readily picked food from my fingers, and the wing had fairly well healed. A bar-tailed godwit, quite uninjured, was brought me about the same time, and the two were removed to more commodious premises, where they lived most amicably for some time. The godwit was fond of a big lobworm, and it was entertaining to watch it set its foot upon a worm too big to swallow whole, break it in halves by a dexterous wrench of its bill, and bolt one half forthwith. The bird was exceedingly dexterous with its foot, using it in a peculiarly hand-like manner, both in keeping the worm from moving out of reach and in assisting the writhing creature down into its gullet. I never before saw a wader make such a use of its foot. Worms, small pieces of suet pudding, wood-lice, and cockles were readily eaten, as well as shrimps and other crustaceans.

The curlew-sandpiper proved very adept at catching flies, and would stand on one leg, apparently dozing, but all the while alert to see or hear the passing of an insect. Did a fly alight within eighteen inches of it, it stood very little chance of escape from the dexterous creature, and those coming within six inches were snapped up without more ado than a deft turn of the neck, and maybe the dropping of the resting leg. I thought this partiality to insects an interesting fact. The godwit drew a line at flies.

* * * * * *

AN EARLY MIGRATION

A most remarkable movement of birds, waders in particular, took place during the last week of August, 1905.

The following extracts from a letter I wrote to the county paper will give an idea of this strange incident:—

"BABEL IN THE MIDNIGHT SKY

"SIR,—Any one abroad on Friday night last, in Yarmouth or Norwich, must certainly have noticed, and probably have been interested in, the strange babel of bird cries that came and went as the bewildered birds wheeled to and fro abovehead. The reason of this delightful hubbub was simple enough, and whereas in times gone by the old folks, sagely wagging their heads, whispered of troubled spirits, the boys and girls of to-day know sufficient about birds and their ways to tell you they were birds on their midnight journeyings, calling to each other so as to keep in touch with their fellows in the dark. The noisiest proceedings, however, took place when most young folks should be a-bed, or they even might have wondered.

"I was in Norwich up till ten o'clock, and from nine to ten I was much interested, as well as delighted, listening with a friend in his 'backyard' in St. Giles', and pitting my knowledge of bird cries against his . . ., and straining our eyes to their utmost in endeavouring to pierce the darkness, hoping to see some of the nearer-approaching flocks reflected against the light that glared upwards into the night.

"Of course, we knew that these early migrants had been 'held up,' fascinated perhaps, bewildered more likely, by the glare of the lights, and held spell-bound, to be released in the morning when light returned. Most of these were undoubtedly young birds, as the earliest travellers mostly are, the younger broods of waders going southward before their elders, instinctively knowing their never-before-travelled road. I knew most were youngsters by their notes that were pitched slightly out of the key their elders pipe in. Among the birds abovehead, at Norwich, were redshanks (by scores), grey plovers (probably in hundreds), a few ringed plovers, here and there a lapwing, and once a sanderling. Other notes, some quite strange to me, were heard.

"On arriving at Yarmouth at eleven, I landed into the thick of the night-wailing, especially in the neighbourhood of Breydon—grey plovers piped in still greater numbers, and goodly flocks of curlews joined in the chorus, numerous dunlins helping. . . . All along homewards I heard the night hosts yelping as if it had been an October night, and the bulk of the migrants were passing. Of course, I associated the S.E. wind with this 'invasion,' and wondered why the glass had not fallen lower. I wonder if the other Norfolk towns were visited in this fashion—probably all of them were.

"Yours truly, JOHN KNOWLITTLE."

Replies to my query were speedily forthcoming, and a note appeared at once as follows :—

"SIR,—Large flocks of birds passed over North Heigham after 10.30 on Friday night, and were crossing for hours. Would they be incoming or outgoing migrants? "J. D."

"W. G. C." wrote: "The arrested migration, which 'John Knowlittle' noted at Norwich and Yarmouth on Friday night, may possibly have extended for a considerable distance along the east coast. It was forced on one's notice at Felixstowe, where the night was very rough, and the calls of birds over the town were audible for many hours. They did not appear to be passing over in comparative quietude, as is, I believe, usual on migration, but were apparently circling round, dazed by the lights of the streets and sea-front. The cries were not easily recognisable by one whose chief natural history experience has been inland, but they were undoubtedly those of waders, whilst some of the harsher calls seemed to be those of gulls."

Mr. J. H. Gurney wrote me on August 28th: "I hear this morning from Cambridge that at that place also numbers of birds were attracted by the lamps on Friday night."

So it would appear that this movement was widespread in East Anglia.

* * * * * *

PENCILLED IN A BOOK

One of my chief delights in looking over the contents of an old bookstall is to turn over the flyleaves, and to conjure up all sorts of romances from the strange names and stranger remarks often found pencilled in some ancient volume. Old natural history books have a peculiar fascination for me, for I have more than once read interesting comments written in pencil on the margins by an interested reader long laid under the grass, but whose deductions and observations remain fresh and entertaining. I will refer to one book only, an old edition of White's *Selborne*, which I purchased for a few pence. Among other "notes" were the following :—

"*Swallows and young.*—It must be borne in mind that the first brood of martins and swallows are led out or driven forth from their nests by the old ones to

make room for the second, and that the second, however early hatched, use the nest, going in and out, and resting at nights until the time of migration. "J. B. C.

"*Red-backed shrike.*—The red-backed shrike is very common in Suffolk, much more so than in Norfolk. I do not believe that it feeds upon small birds, but beetles and insects. The great ash-coloured shrike is the only one of the species capable of destroying small birds. . . . When a youth, in 1826, I shot a very fine great ash-coloured shrike upon the Great Friars' Thorn Farm at Swaffham. "J. B. C.

"*Goatsucker.*—I was once crossing Mr. Last's marshes at Aldeburgh, after having been flight-shooting, and passing some alder trees, a goat-sucker flew from me, and quite close round my head, and *whilst upon the wing* he made his awful jar, by which I was no little startled. "J. B. C.

"*Grey hares.*—Some years since a white hare was shot near Norwich. I saw it afterwards preserved in the collection of the late Rev. Charles Penrice (Plumstead Hall). In 1849 I saw two grey leverets about a quarter grown; this was at Westleton, Suffolk, where they informed me grey hares were frequently seen. "J. B. C.

"*Snow bunting.*—I have often seen the snow bunting at Albro', but only when the weather has been intensely cold. "J. B. C.

"*Smaller bustard.*—In 1833 one of the smaller bustards was shot near Norwich, and the person who shot it sold it for a shilling, not knowing what it was. "J. B. C.

"*White thrush.*—I once saw a thrush perfectly white; this was at Mr. Armes', Heyham, Norwich, who gave a very long price for it, but it sold in London for a much larger sum, viz. £11. "J. B. C."

There were a number of items of less interest, which I did not think worth while copying.

* * * * * *

GULLS AND INSECTS

The black-headed gull is, to my mind, the most fastidious eater of all the *Laridæ*. Marine worms, crustacea, and little

fishes stranded in "lows" he prefers, perhaps, to anything,

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Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. — PHIL. iv. 6.

WE tell Thee of our care,
Of the sore burden, pressing day by day,
And in the light and pity of Thy face,
The burden melts away.

We breathe our secret wish,
The importunate longing which no man may see;
We ask it humbly, or, more restful still,
We leave it all to Thee.

SUSAN COOLIDGE.

THAT prayer which does not succeed in moderating our wish, in changing the passionate desire into still submission, the anxious, tumultuous expectation into silent surrender, is no true prayer, and proves that we have not the spirit of true prayer. That life is most holy in which there is least of petition and desire, and most of waiting upon God; that in which petition most often passes into thanksgiving. Pray till prayer makes you forget your own wish, and leave it or merge it in God's will. The Divine wisdom has given us prayer, not as a means whereby to obtain the good things of earth, but as a means whereby we learn to do without them; not as a means whereby we escape evil, but as a means whereby we become strong to meet it.

F. W. ROBERTSON.

SPECIMEN PAGE

'Daily Strength for Daily Needs."

114 REMEMBERED GRACE

Through the remember'd grace
Of that divine embrace,
Of his sad errors none,
Though gross to blame,
Shall cast him lower than the cleansing flame,
Nor make him quite depart
From the small flock named "after God's own heart,"
And to themselves unknown.
Nor can he quail
In faith, nor flush nor pale
When all the other idiot people spell
How this or that new prophet's word belies
Their last high oracle;
But constantly his soul
Points to its pole,
Even as the needle points and knows not why;
And, under the ever-changing clouds of doubt,
When others cry,
"The stars, if stars there were,
Are quenched and out!"
To him, uplooking t'ward the hills for aid,
Appear, at need display'd,
Gaps in the low-hung gloom, and, bright in air,
Orion or the Bear.

COVENTRY PATMORE

SPECIMEN PAGE
"A Little Book of Life and Death."

Daily Strength for Daily Needs

Originally Published by Messrs. Sampson Low & Co.

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Eleventh Edition	*April 1905*
Twelfth Edition	*January 1906*
Thirteenth Edition	*January 1907*
Fourteenth Edition	*October 1907*
Fifteenth Edition	*October 1908*
Sixteenth Edition	*1909*

A Little Book of Life and Death

First Published	*June 1902*
Second Edition	*January 1903*
Third Edition	*June 1903*
Fourth Edition	*February 1904*
Fifth Edition	*November 1904*
Sixth Edition	*January 1905*
Seventh Edition	*September 1905*
Eighth Edition	*December 1905*
Ninth Edition	*October 1906*
Tenth Edition	*April 1907*
Eleventh Edition	*March 1908*
Twelfth Edition	*September 1909*

fishes stranded in "lows" he prefers, perhaps, to anything, while floating bread and fragments on the tide are gleaned in times of scarcity; but the vile carrion that delights his larger relatives he does not gratefully fall back on. But insects he always delights to patronise with his attentions, and many of the *Tipula*, *Staphylina*, and *Dipteræ*, which are blown into Breydon, are scrupulously gathered. Moths that essay a trip across in the summer evenings are not despised, while blue-bottles which have discovered a carcase by its scent, are coveted tit-bits. When commenting on this insectivorous proclivity of *Larus ridibundus* in the county paper, the following note in reply to my remarks was inserted:—

"SIR,—In connection with this correspondence in your paper, I should like to say that the beautiful May-fly (beloved of trout and trout-anglers) is one of the gull's insect victims. I have seen gulls catch them on our own rivers; and on some of the Irish loughs a good rise of May-fly means a grand feast for the gulls. The gulls assemble in flocks on some of the big lakes, and directly the flies begin to flutter to the surface, and dance about it, down swoop the watchful birds. In this way large numbers of May-flies are devoured, and the sport of the trout-angler suffers in consequence.

"A. R. M."

I feel inclined to add a pronounced "?" to the last line of "A. R. M's" communication; for despite lament, both gulls and anglers get their fair share of sport, especially if the latter be only half as expert as their rivals.

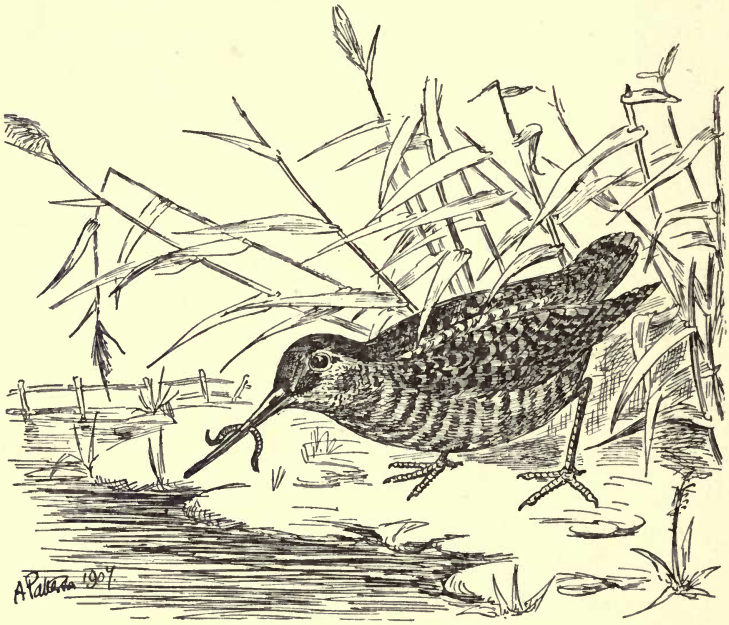
* * * * * *

SOME WOODCOCK NOTES

When I was a lad the wearing of a number of the axillary feathers of the woodcock in the band of a cap or hat was a sort of sign amongst the shooting fraternity that the wearer had something to be proud of in having shot a bird or birds of this species: one feather denoting one woodcock, and so on. A sportsman nowadays, under ordinary circumstances, would generally be able to show but a very few indeed. Yearly this species seems to be visiting us in decreasing numbers.

The woodcock invariably arrives tired out, which is not to

be wondered at, considering its bulky form; and on arriving from across-seas it alights to rest on the first opportunity that offers. A clump of furze, a tuft of marams, or a bush offer ample shelter; and in very bare places it is astonishing how easily its plumage harmonises with the surrounding colour. On October 14th, 1905, I was strolling along the New Road, near Breydon, when a man in a garden hailed me, saying that he had just put up a woodcock, and pointed out to me an exposed grassy spot just under a low, scrubby



A LIKELY CORNER. WOODCOCK

bush; the grass was pressed down, and excreta lay on it. The man assured me he had passed and repassed the place several times that day, but had not noticed the stranger hidden there; and there can be no doubt that the cock had dropped in there before daybreak, and had rested itself until the eventide. This habit of lying close has been fatal to several birds to my certain knowledge.

A woodcock which I examined on December 15th, 1905, weighed twelve ounces, and had a remarkably short bill, barely measuring two inches in length.

Arrivals were late in the autumn of 1906. The first brought to market appeared on November 3rd. One had been previously killed on September 30th. The usual mishaps occurred. I heard of a woodcock being entangled in the bough of a fir tree. A bird in November was seen to fly through one of the streets and make in the direction of the Town Hall, where it was afterwards seized when asleep on one of the upstair window-sills. Four were observed to come in from sea at daybreak on the morning of November 1st, flying low over the water as if wing-weary.

A woodcock was flushed from a garden flower-bed, which overlooks Breydon, on July 2nd, 1905.

I picked up the remains of a woodcock at the tidemark on April 20th, 1906. In all probability this was a migrant victim, overcome by the recent severe easterly gales.

Until the autumn of 1906 my heaviest recorded woodcock was fifteen ounces; but one taken on board a lightship weighed sixteen ounces dead weight when brought ashore.

* * * * * *

THE GREAT CRESTED GREBE

It is gratifying to know that this charming bird still breeds regularly with us on the Norfolk Broads, and that even those who seem eager, *from privilege*, to shoot almost every winged thing, as well as the Broad folk generally, seem proud of its presence there.

In August, 1906, I was witness to a very pretty display of fish-catching by a female grebe, which almost entirely ignored my presence in its domains at a corner of Filby Broad. It is impossible to describe the stately manner of its swimming, or convey an idea of its lightning-like plunges into the depths of the Broad: it seems an intensely living, joyous thing, whose grace of motion is only equalled by its beauty.

Accompanying the grebe were two or three young ones, uttering queer "peepy" cries like so many little ducks; they approached their parent one at a time, as if in turn, to receive the small roach invariably brought to them for food. The old bird would lift her head erect, stretching her neck to the fullest, and spreading her crest, as if to inspire and

excite her progeny, which would flutter up, fussily swimming, almost flatten themselves on the surface as they came within reach of her, and with extreme rapidity snatch the fish that she lowered for their taking. The old male joined the party and helped in the fun.

On the land this species is scarcely so graceful, and always makes a very poor hand at progression. An example which I kept in September, 1901, in an aviary, shambled along on its breast and abdomen with far less poetry of motion than a seal; but my friend Mr. J. C. Knights informs me that on one occasion a great crested grebe came ashore apparently slightly wounded. He pursued it, when it dashed away from him along the beach, bolt upright, running most nimbly on the tips of its great flat toes.

Some time ago, during the period of migration, a great crested grebe struck the vane of Martham Church spire as it flew at night, severing its wing. This bird Mr. Knights preserved.

* * * * * *

SCOTER AND "SHELL-FISH"

I have before referred to the striking partiality of the common scoter (*Œdemia nigra*) for the radiated trough-shell (*Mactra stultorum*).[1] In my youthful days it was a regular thing for a large contingent of these "mussel-ducks" to put in an appearance in November, north of the Britannia Pier, and remain there all winter. But of late years great changes have been taking place in the roadstead, north of the town, and in the coast-line (as well as south of Gorleston), in consequence of the continual wearing away of the sand-cliffs; the position of certain sandbanks has also been affected by the stronger currents now obtaining inshore. The Patch,[2] too, has vanished; and in my opinion, judging by the scoters deserting that part of the coast, alterations have also taken place in the beds of "shell-fish" that used to lie there; and I think it more than likely that the bay, or "bight," formed between Gorleston and Corton, affords the trough-shell and many other marine invertebrates excellent shelter. There the scoters do now most delight to congregate, sure of a

[1] *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, pp. 57, 145.
[2] *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, pp. 31–2.

plentiful supply of food, and safe from prowling gunners. When strolling to Corton on November 15th, 1905, I counted nearly two hundred scoters, diving and floating, about a hundred and fifty yards from the shore. A flock of them occasionally puts in an appearance in the Ham.

The shrimpers complained of taking quantities of the cross-fish in their nets in May and June, 1906, when fishing off the north of Yarmouth; and they remarked to me on the disappearance of a considerable bed of horse-mussels which existed near the bell-buoy some little while ago. Empty valves only are now dredged up, the star-fishes having, they allege, attacked them in great numbers and killed them all. Probably this is another reason for the scoters changing their feeding-grounds.

* * * * * *

POCHARDS AND "POKER-GRASS"

In my conversations with the oldest men about Breydon, who can remember great changes having taken place, not only with regard to the lessening of certain species, but in the formation of the place, together with alterations in its salinity and its plant-life, nearly all of them (there are at most half a score only now living) have referred to a plant which they called "poker-grass"—poker being a local synonym for pochard. I have tried hard to identify this plant, which locally must have become extinct; and have made numerous inquiries respecting it.

Mr. Robert Gurney remarks: "I cannot help you about the plant. . . . It sounds rather like *Potamogeton pectinatum*. I think that is what the pochards feed on at Horsey and Hickling—there are masses of it there."

In the September of 1906 I visited Hickling and Horsey Broads, and saw considerable patches of it; but it did not satisfy me as to its being the weed described by the old Breydoners. I therefore wrote to the *Eastern Daily Press* as follows:—

"SIR,—When in conversation with one of the worn-out Breydoners . . . he greatly aroused my interest by referring to a large bed of what he termed 'poker-grass,' that grew on the flats in the old days, when fresh water obtained there for

many days at a stretch; and when, even on the neap tides, at low water, two or three feet of water covered portions of Breydon that to-day are bare at half-tide. . . . It was a plant after the habit of *Zostera marina*, which grew white flowers above, and little white knobs below. It was for these 'knobs' that the large flocks of pochards used to visit Breydon where, except in the severest winters, they may now be looked upon almost as rarities. I can find nothing of the kind to-day. . . .

"JOHN KNOWLITTLE."

I received the following replies:—

"RUSSELL SQUARE, LONDON.

"DEAR MR. PATTERSON,

"I am staying here just at present, but I read your letter *re* 'poka-grass' in the *D. Press* with much interest. It struck me I might gather some information upon it at the Natural History Museum at S. Kensington, so to-day I went there and showed your letter to Mr. B—— and Mr. G—— The latter is the compiler of the new edition of *Babington*. . . . They referred to different catalogues, but could find nothing that corresponded to description. I suggested the plant might be *Zanichellia palustris*, but that these had not white flowers, but there are found little seed vessels closely packed along the stems, which might look tempting to a pochard. This likes both fresh, saline, and salt water. At the same time I have no doubt it is common about Breydon, and would not be likely to have disappeared.

"F. L. (*Norwich*)."

"OULTON BROAD, *November*, 1905.

"DEAR SIR,—In response to your request in the *Daily Press*, I will roughly give you a little of my experience. . . . You can make what use you like of it. Had you named the man who gave you the information regarding Breydon, I should probably have been able to tell you something of his repute fifty years ago, when the Lower Run [North Wall drain] took one in a gunboat to Rotten Eye up to half-tide. Fringing the channel was hard mud, getting softer towards the North Wall, and a bottomless swamp reached from Rotten Eye to Duffell's rond! Between the hard and the soft mud grew what you call 'widgeon-grass,' but at that time was dubbed 'goose-grass' by gunners, known as 'alva' to upholsterers, and I think as *Zostera* to scientists, abounding from the channel to the north bank above Duffell's rond. Rotten Eye also abounded in what we called 'cabbage' [*Ulva lactuca*], but the poker-

grass you describe I do not remember. Pochards are distinctly fresh-water feeders . . . and a grass called 'poker-grass' abounds on Heigham Sounds and Hickling Broad. Some thirty years ago the Rev. Micklethwaite, of Hickling, sent me a hamper of it, which I planted in my decoy-pond at North Cove, but whether it is there now I know not, but no pochards ever sought it. . . .

"In 1853, the late Fielding Harmer and myself were on a shooting expedition in Heigham, Hickling, and Horsea [Horsey], and we then discovered that large flocks of pochards spent their day in safety on Ranworth Broad (then a decoy in active operation); at dusk they came in a sweeping mass straight on to Heigham Sounds. We could easily have intercepted them and got two or three as they passed over, but our object was to shoot a pound of shot into the mass the moment they alighted. In this we were unsuccessful, although we stuck to them for a week; so we determined the next year to visit the Sounds in November, and give every night to them until we accomplished our object. But we were baffled; we found the exact spot where many of them alighted, but on touching the water they went down like stones after their favourite grass, and came to the surface in detail, and straggled out, rendering a big shot impossible. We then discovered, by careful watching, that they collected in the morning, sometimes as early as 3 a.m., and took their departure. So we spent night after night in trying to accomplish our object, only to discover that at a given signal they arose from straggling positions, took a sweep round until they got together, and then made off.

"Baffled in this, we sailed down to Breydon, to find out what we could of the habits of the fowl thereon during the night, and lay moored in the old *Hornet* for some three weeks at Lamb's rond. This sounds funny now, but at that time you could sail right *across* Breydon at half-tide above the Cross Stake, and getting over a ridge near the channel, found deeper water; and you could mostly reach the channel by Bessey's drain (which was stopped by the old hulk [*Agnes*]), but always by Duffell's drain, which at that time was, at extreme low water, only two or three hundred yards long, when it opened into deep water.[1]

"During our visit we learned much of the habits of widgeon and mallard, also something of the waders and herons, but never a pochard ever came in to feed, although straggling parcels dropped in from time to time for prospecting, therefore I fancy you will find that 'poker-grass' never existed

[1] It now reaches from Dan Banham's mill to Stake 14, nearly a mile; and is deep and wide even at low water.

on Breydon, certainly not at Rotten Eye, and if at all, at the back of the Dickey Works would be the most likely, as fresh water prevails there more than anywhere on Breydon, whereas Rotten Eye is, or rather was, the spot for salt water, straight up the Lower Run and Wall drain.

"I went on a gunning expedition one winter with the late Fielding Harmer, and another with the late F. Palmer, and my experience as to pochards and 'poker-grass,' also 'widgeon-grass,' was practically the same as on Breydon or the Scottish Firths. There the widgeon feed on the banks (where a foot or more of mud over the hard sand and rocks, is conducive to its growth), pulling up vast quantities at low water, which floated, and was fed on by hordes of brent geese, which came in from sea every morning after sunrise, and departed before dark, after which they never showed up except when violent storms were near to hand or had passed, or hard frosts had upset their daily habits; but widgeon feed night or day at the time.

"I am informed that dotterel have become exceedingly scarce, in consequence of certain of their feathers being in great demand for fly-fishing. This September, in the centre of Norway, on the top of a flattish mountain about 3000 feet high, where there was only short moss and occasional bogs, I find a few had been breeding, also golden plovers. This rather surpassed me.

"W. S. E."

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DUCK-SHOOTING NOTES

Some years ago I had the good fortune to visit a rather eccentric individual at Haddiscoe, in whose grounds a small artificial lake had been constructed and planted round with a strikingly varied plantation of *Coniferæ*, including some of the rarest of the firs. If I remember rightly the lake was not much more than half an acre in extent, but the quietude of the spot and its proximity to a fairly good duck country, made this snug retreat very attractive at times to small flocks of ducks. I subsequently received a note from Mr. P—— (since deceased), which I think of sufficient interest to reproduce here, and I am strongly of opinion that many gentlemen of means, who have the same conveniences, might harbour on their estates these desirable fowl, while a judicious taming and pinioning of mallard or decoy ducks would add to these attractions. Mr. P—— wrote:—

"DEAR SIR,—I have an account of numbers of duck shot each year, going back ten or eleven years. This year (1897) I have not fired at a wild duck, and last year only shot two. My shooting record was carried out under strict sportsman's rules, that is, birds shot at *singly* on the wing, no shot allowed at a number sitting together on the water. Only sitting shots allowed when fowl darted down, and it would be next to impossible to get them on the wing, and I always studied not to remain too late, but to pick up birds and get away before being quite dark, so that some fowl might settle down quietly after leaving, as shooting late there is danger in breaking their hold and frightening all fowl away, and thus lose the 'lead.' Moreover, as a rule, I never began to shoot until fowl had got a good hold, and when fowl came well. I could seldom shoot more than five nights in a fortnight.

"1883,	'A.P.,'	40	shots, flying,	19	ducks
	'E.P.,'	4	„ „	2	„
		—	— sitting,	12	„
"1884,	'A.P.,'	81	shots, flying,	37	„
	'E.P.,'	31	„ „	11	„
		—	— sitting,	29	„
"1885,	'A.P.,'	64	„ flying,	33	„
	'E.P.,'	6	„ „	0	„
	Long,	6	„ „	4	„
		—	— sitting,	14	„
"1886,	'A.P.,'	19	„ flying,	10	„
	'E.P.,'	3	„ „	1	„
	Sayer,	2	„ „	1	„
		—	— sitting,	6	„
"1887,	'A.P.,'	58	„ flying,	28	„
	Sayer,	50	„ „	26	„
	Long,	41	„ „	24	„
	'E.P.,'	6	„ „	1	„
		—	— sitting,	17	„

Total 33. Total 77. Total 51. Total 18. Total 96.

"The year 1887 was by far the best year. The next being ——" [Unfortunately the remaining portion of the letter is missing.—A. H. P.]

In December, 1899, I received a short note from Mr. P——, who complained that "only a very few wild ducks came to my pond the last two years.

"1893 to February, 1894, 33 were shot,
"1895, 1896, to February, 1897, only 11 or 12,

and not any after this time. Some were seen about a week ago flying close over the water, but they did not come down.

"Yours truly, A. J. P."

AN OLD POACHER'S YARN

If all the good things seen by naturalists were "made a note of" and could be preserved and given to the public, what a vast addition to the store of general knowledge would accrue! The same may be said with regard to those whose occupations and hobbies bring them into contact with wild life at various seasons of the year. However ignorant and unobservant a man may be, strange things and happenings must appeal to him from time to time; and as a rule those who spend much of their time in the open and the wild are men of keen observation. Only get into the confidence of such men, and they will astonish you by their knowledge of Nature's ways, and by their store of anecdotes. More is the pity that so much rich field-lore dies with them. My chats with old Breydoners, as my small volumes will bear testimony to, show at once what, even in my own little sphere, would have been lost but for the little trouble I have taken from time to time in jotting down the narratives. Every naturalist, I boldly assert, should feel it his duty as well as a pleasure to place such interesting facts as he may meet with at least in black and white in his notebooks. It may be urged that when these men spin yarns they interweave with them much that is fabulous. That depends upon whom they yarn to. To a man who they *feel* is an honest one, they will keep within the confines of truth. If they imagine a man knows as much as they do they will respect him, and not try to astonish him. I make these remarks because I feel assured there is much native lore irretrievably lost with the demise of every gamekeeper, bird-catcher, mole-snarer, wildfowler, and poacher—the last-named being not the least interesting, shrewd, or observant. At his feet I would sooner sit at any hour of the day or night, and listen to his experiences and deductions, than at the knee of his deadly rival, the more prosaic and matter-of-fact gamekeeper. The naturalist would do well to make friends of these outdoor rovers all, for there is always something to learn from, and usually much to interest and amuse in their tales and gossips. I do not profess to find anything exceptional in "my" old poacher friend's yarn, for I only happened with him casually, in a little country town inn where he, toned down by the Salvation

Army methods to a fairly honourable, only-a-half-pint-occasionally, and law-abiding-under-the-circumstances sort of man, acted as ostler, boots, footman, shopman, and general factotum. I was staying at A——, in March, 1906, having just recovered from a severe illness. A—— is as dull and sleepy a little place as a Canadian backwoods village, and the only excitement I could find was in dropping into the inn-parlour for an hour or so each day to gossip with the natives —and I a life-long abstainer too!

I had one or two interesting gossips with this Salvation Army poacher. Once, when tending sheep, he was "suspicioned" by a keeper who "pal'd up" to him on the road going home. There was a fine cock pheasant strutting about in the road.

"Look 'ere," said the keeper, "if you hit that old pheasant with a stone, you may have him."

"Now, if I hadn't ha' bin a bit o' a fule, I should ha' hulled awk'ard-like, for I cud chuck a stone about as strait as most folk, and nearly hit that owd fessant in the hid; an' he worn't the fust as I'd tried at."

B—— wished he'd gone wider of the mark, for the keeper ever after kept a sharp eye on him, although, as it happened, he was more than a match in cunning for "velveteens."

That the average poacher is a keen reader of men, resourceful, tactful, and learns marvellous self-restraint, goes almost without saying. One day B—— hit the road and ran foul of the village policeman, whom he accosted in a pleasant and perfectly easy manner, and the two walked together to the village in friendly converse.

"He little thought, 'bor," said B——, "I'd got a 'long-tail' crammed into each pocket!"

Speaking in the third person, he told me how "two of 'em" were out poaching one night, when they were disturbed by the keeper and the police and had to run for it. Finding themselves uncomfortably hemmed in, they made for a neglected pit of water, reedy and weed-surrounded, and quietly dropped into it, submerging themselves all but their faces, having made for an overhanging clump of brambles, into which they thrust up their heads. The keepers, although they declared they saw the poachers come that way, hunted long and carefully, and at length, mightily chagrined, gave

up the chase. He tersely ended the narrative by remarking: "One man took a bad chill—and died; the other—*didn't*."

Various dodges to outwit keepers and police practised by poachers single-handed, and by those who "did the thing" more largely and scientifically, were detailed—the bumbling of wheels with sacks, and encasing the pony's feet with others to deaden sound and confuse footprints and cart-tracks; the decoying of keepers on to wrong scents, and various other methods which form part of the poachers' creed, were all exceedingly interesting to listen to, even if they did not tend to edification.

Passing a certain mansion, my friend remarked, pointing thither:—

"You see that house? Well, old C—— lived there; he hated poachers like the —— and dogs like pizen, and could hardly sleep a-nights for thinkin' of his precious game. No one dust bring a dog through the village but he must go after 'em, no matter who they was, and ax no ind of questions what didn't consarn him. 'Be careful! that's all,' he'd say, and watch 'em go away. He was dowst hard on poachers when they cum up afore him, and gave 'em all the law'd allow, and more, if he dust. Two poachers owed him a grudge—one of 'em especially. So one night they must go and make a reg'lar good haul, and they wanted him to know it, but it wasn't safe hardly, of course, to 'rite him aforehand. So afore they quits the grounds they goes and sits for a rest on his doorstep.

"'Hardly worth wastin' time?' axes J——.

"'Dunno, why?' axes the other.

"'Suppose we git a cuppel or three ready for to-morrer's dinner?' says he, takin' three or four out of the sack.

"Now pluckin' a long-tail ain't pertickler hard work, nor yet a very noisy job. So they just plucks the two brace, and spreads the feathers nicely round the door steppin' for Squire C——'s 'special eddyfication next mornin'."

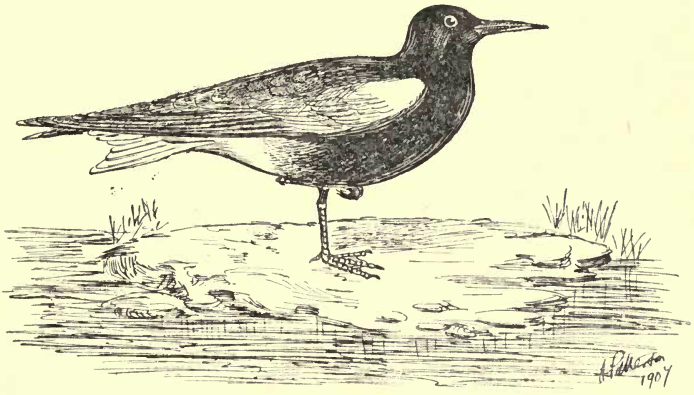
"How did he take it?" I asked, smiling.

"Well, 'bor," said he, "*don't axt!* There was a pretty how-to-do, I can tell yow. He was just lost for wudds!"

It is hardly necessary to narrate anything more desperate, but if I have made it plain to my reader that it is worth while to collect information from such hardy and interesting sons of Nature, I have said sufficient.

SUFFOLK TERNS AND FISHES

A ternery exists near Aldeburgh, on the shingly beach at Orford, a locality far less accessible, but equally suited to the nesting habits of the common tern and the little tern, as the marshes near Blakeney and Cley and Wells. I attempted to pay this spot a visit in 1896, but from sheer leg-weariness gave it up after trudging four miles through yielding shingle, and finding that there were at least four more to traverse before the spot could be reached. I saw terns in the distance, and noted the great similarity of the wind-polished stones, which were covered with the *Hypothallus* of *Lecidea petræa*,



WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN

to those seen at Wells. Amongst these the eggs of terns and ringed plovers would be distinguished only with difficulty by an unpractised eye. I certainly expected to see far more birds than I did.

A falling-off in the "take" of smelts in the summer of 1906, was stupidly laid to the blame of the Orford terns; the ignorant fishermen (whose honesty I much doubted) made complaint to the local authorities, and things began to look very black for the birds. In the *Angler's News* of September 1st appeared the following paragraph:—

"*Seabirds and smelt.*—Since the Suffolk County Council has forbidden the taking of the common tern or its eggs, smelt-fishing on the Alde has been practically ruined. After a conference with the fishermen, Mr. R. L. Everett, M.P., is taking the matter up with a view to the removal of the restriction."

Protests were made against this projected slaughter, and the following letter, which was printed in the *Norwich Mercury* of November 14th, is worthy of a place here:—

"TERNS IN EAST SUFFOLK

"At a meeting of the General Purposes Committee of the East Suffolk County Council on Tuesday, the following letter, addressed to Lord Rendlesham by Mr. G. P. Hope, was read: 'As a landowner in East Suffolk, I trust I may be allowed to protest against the assigned reason (as reported in the London papers) for rescinding the order protecting terns' eggs by the East Suffolk County Council. I know, as a fact, the statement that there are 40,000 terns breeding on the Suffolk coast is a gross exaggeration. The highest estimate of terns on the Orford Beach is 2000. I put it less than half that number. I spent three weeks during the breeding season, chiefly up the river and on the North Weir, watching terns, and photographing theirs and other nests. At the end, near Shingle Street, there were about thirty nests, and at the Lighthouse end there could not have been more than three times that number. The last time I really looked for nests was nineteen years ago, and I was struck by the marked reduction in the number of nests and of birds, while if you go another twenty years back the decrease is very much more evident. The food of the terns consists of shrimps and other small crustaceans, small fish, chiefly the young of garfish or garbills, sand eels, young herrings, etc.; many of them will even take dragon flies and water beetles. Possibly they may get a few smelts, but as the female smelt is calculated to produce 36,000 young, the damage done is not appreciable. I found five different kinds of terns—Sandwich, Arctic, common, and little tern, and saw two white-winged black terns; there were no black terns this year. Some of these, including the majority of the little terns, were feeding in the pools on the edge of the marshes, where it is unlikely they would find smelts. When the terns were more numerous there were many more smelts, and it is just as sensible to say that the terns have affected the smelt fishery, as to say that they have driven the lobsters from the East Coast, or the mackerel from the Cornish Coast, because they are scarce this year. Several people used to make a good thing out of terns' eggs, taking them and selling them for plovers' eggs, and one is driven to the conclusion that there are other fish to fry than smelts. I trust it is not too late for the County Council to reconsider their verdict, and to allow the order to remain in force for another year, when I hope it is possible something may be done to allow the

owner of the property to protect eggs on his own land. If people are allowed to take terns' eggs, it follows they will not stop there, but take other wild birds' eggs, such as redshanks, ringed dotterel, rock pipit, wheatears, etc.; in fact, every bird nesting on the shingle. P.S.—I may mention the breeding of the birds was very much affected by the cold winds and sharp frosts in June; it is possible the inclement weather may also have affected the fish. A large number of terns have now left the breeding ground and the neighbourhood.' The committee decided to embrace the letter in their report to the council."

I have no hesitation in suggesting that climatic and tidal influences were more accountable for the scarcity of smelts at their proper season; with quite as much justice might the fishermen complain that the terns were responsible for the early failure of the sprat fishery, for sprats up till November 6th had not yet put in an appearance—nor had I seen a Suffolk sprat up till that date at Yarmouth—an unprecedented thing in my experience.

On November 24th the following appeared in the *Norwich Mercury*:—

"THE EAST COAST SPRAT FISHING

"The sprat fishing on the East Coast is a failure, for reasons that no one appears able to fathom. Aldeburgh, the head of the industry, holds a yearly municipal feast, but it is doubtful whether this commemorative banquet can be held. One compensation is, however, found in the fact that the herrings have come further south, and the Aldeburgh fishermen have managed to recoup themselves. It is suggested that the arrival of the herrings may be responsible for the disappearance of the sprats."

On this note I commented in the *Eastern Daily Press* of November 29th, as follows:—

"I must confess to experiencing a feeling of deep satisfaction when I read the other day in one of your contemporaries that 'the sprat fishing on the East Coast is a failure for reasons that no one appears able to fathom,' etc. Things looked a little better yesterday and Monday, when a few tubs of sprats put in an appearance on the fish wharf; but it is to be hoped that the more ignorant of the Aldeburgh fishermen, who laid the fault of the failure of the smelt fishery to the innocent little terns, have now made up their minds that that failure was 'due to reasons that no

one appears able to fathom.' I felt mightily indignant when all the hue and cry was raised by these said ignorant fishermen against the terns, and very nearly committed myself to pen and ink over it; but having further thought out the reason of the failure, it occurred to me at the time that the same 'reasons' might affect the migratorial movements of *Clupea sprattus*, in like manner. So notwithstanding the fact that my yearly November fries of luscious sprats this season have been conspicuous by their absence, I am, I honestly admit, delighted to find my hopes realised, to a certain extent, for no prophet, for good or evil, likes to see his prophecies vain.

"Surely our Aldeburgh fisher folk, ignorant folk, and others do not lay the absence of sprats to the terns? And for the life of me, I don't see how they could reasonably lay the absence of smelts to the same little birds. I've visited both Southwold and Aldeburgh and was struck by the fewness of terns, having been led to believe them much more numerous. I've watched terns, little, black, common, and Arctic, times and often, and seen the Caspian and the Sandwich terns fishing also, and with the exception of the black terns, never saw them rise with anything else than herring syle, i.e. young herrings, locally termed 'whitebait.' I never once saw a smelt between their mandibles. While the terns are with us myriads of young herrings are usually flashing about near the surface of the sea. Immature smelts of the size they might like are found in our waters in winter time; and large smelts the terns do not and cannot tackle. Let those Aldeburgh fishermen own up honestly, and say that it was for the sake of the money the birds' skins and wings would fetch from some milliner's agent or agents, and not revenge for the supposed wrongs they inflicted on them. If not honest, be reasonable! I hope my note will fall into the hands of certain of those M.P.'s and others directly or indirectly interested, who may on second thoughts form an opinion that it is always best to weigh a matter well, more especially as affects the well-being of other creatures, who have, after all is said and done, as much right to the herrings, or smelts even, as we have.

"Further, may I point out that a sprat is a true species, which spawns in March; that young herrings are nothing but young herrings, and that there is no such species as 'whitebait,' which is only a collective name for the young of shads, herrings, and sprats, with a sprinkling now and again of blennies, gobies, and sticklebacks, according to season and locality. Norfolk 'whitebait' is none other than immature herrings. Further, that sardines are not a

true species, but the young of the pilchard, except where dishonesty steps in and sprats are manufactured into 'sardines.'

"Finally, not being on the spot, I will not be dogmatic enough to say what I believe to have been the cause of these variations in the usually methodical movements of both smelts and sprats. I have an opinion; and in the many years I have delighted to study fishes (and other creatures) and their ways, I have always found that effects were preceded by definite causes (except in the case of a man driving a wheelbarrow). But the causes affecting the fishes in question were such as are wholly unpreventable by man. Perhaps some one will venture an opinion before I presume to suggest my own. "Yours truly, JOHN KNOWLITTLE.

"GREAT YARMOUTH."

On December 1st I received the following interesting letter from an old naturalist friend. He wrote :—

"OULTON BROAD, *November 29th*, 1906.

"DEAR MR. PATTERSON,

"I know nothing about sprats and less [about] herrings, but an experienced fisherman told me a month or so ago that they would not get the big shoals of herrings in until the temperature of the sea fell to 32 deg. I believe that the sea temperature during the last two months has been abnormally high, and I know that it did not fall to 49 deg. in Lowestoft Harbour until last Sunday.

"Now if you confer with . . . our engineer at the Ice Factory, South Quay, they can show you a record of sea temperatures which, I believe, they have kept since we started ice-making. I make this suggestion to you because I believe the periodical migration of fish is more ruled by the temperature of the water than anything else, and that some of the, at present, unsolved problems on this question will be materially forwarded by records of the variation of sea temperatures, which partly answers the question asked in the *Daily Press*.

"The Baltic emptying its waters, and the Gulf Stream striking the land near Bergen, make that the most rainy place in Europe, and these waters forming uncertain eddies of hot and cold, I fancy account to a great extent to the uncertain migration of fishes and to their habits also. . . .

"Yours truly, W. S. E."

And on December 15th, 1906, referring to the proposed

interference with the Aldeburgh terns, "J. G. T." wrote me the following from Bury St. Edmunds :—

"There has been an agitation in East Suffolk to remove the prohibition of taking the eggs of the common tern, on the ground that the birds do damage to the smelt fishery, which I consider absolute nonsense; and the real reason, in my opinion, is that people want to gather the eggs. I am told on very good authority that the Sandwich tern bred on our Suffolk coast last season. My correspondent assures me he photographed a nest with one egg, and had an old bird which had struck the wire. I saw one or two Sandwich terns off Lowestoft, or rather Pakefield, last September, but these would no doubt be birds from the Farne Islands. I should not be surprised to hear of their breeding on the Norfolk coast."

SHORT NOTES FROM THE DIARY

BIRDS

In *East Coast Notes* a series of "Short Notes" were inserted (pp. 176–90) which, although brief, were thought to be of interest. The following, some of them passed over at the time, have been considered sufficiently entertaining to find a place in the present volume. Others have been jotted down in the "Notebook" more recently.

1900

Jan. —A male teal came into my hands on the 23rd, which was already commencing to change its plumage. Between the eyes and the base of the beak the feathers had assumed a grey colour, with a few dark spots only showing.

Feb. —During the very severe weather of December, 1899, the fieldfares seemed to be in no way inconvenienced; but a sharp spell setting in early this month killed many of them. A number were found dead in St. George's Park.

Mar. 28th.—Some rooks very busy patrolling a marsh, grubbing out wireworms; they beat over the ground in so regular a manner that little remained unexamined. Manure was thrust aside as adroitly as turnstones toss aside sea-wrack, in order to see what lay hidden beneath.

Mar. 28*th.*—A large flock of fully two thousand starlings manœuvring on a marsh near the town. It is unusual to see such an assemblage so late in the season. Probably they were late-hatched birds of the previous year. Query—Did they intend migrating eastwards? I have usually seen them both coming in and going away in small flocks of from ten to thirty.

„ 29*th.*—Bunches of starlings passing over the town, high up, in wedge form, going direct east. Probably detachments from the flock of yesterday.

May 5*th.*—I have several times noted the connection there appears to be between the advent of grey plovers and a spell of wind from the S.E. Several grey plovers on Breydon to-day, noisily piping. Wind, S.S.W. *How will it be to-morrow?*

„ 6*th.*—Wind suddenly gone round to S.E. Curiously coinciding with yesterday's arrival of grey plovers.

„ 7*th.*—Wind very puffy to-night, with squalls.

„ 16*th.*—Two shovelers, very busy on the *Zostera*, picking *Hydrobia ulvæ* off the prostrate stems. Heron having caught a large eel, very much pestered by a pursuing flock of gulls, which harassed it a-wing and afloat. Bitter N.E. wind.

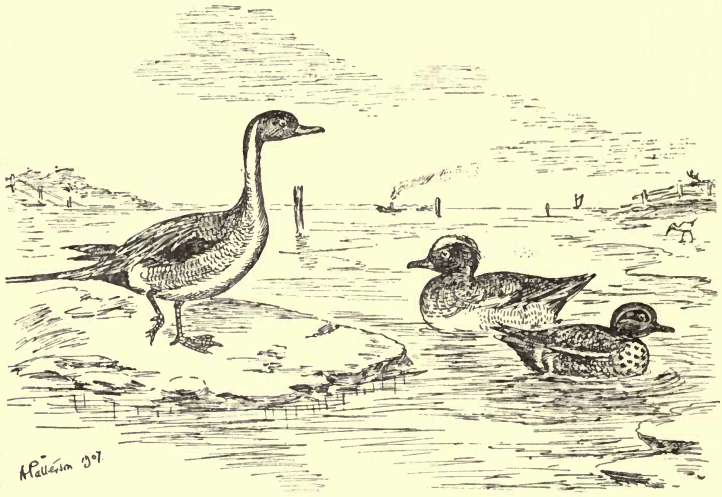
„ 25*th.*—Several grey plovers on Breydon. Wind, S.W. (Wind changed to N.E. next morning, and in afternoon to S.E.)

July 5*th*—Four dunlins, adults, with black breasts; surely these were birds returning. I have seen young birds here on the 7th of July. As they breed freely in some of the more northern counties of England this is not, perhaps, remarkable.

Sept. 12*th.*—The landrail has been plentiful in the neighbourhood lately. I saw no less than eight on a poulterer's stall to-day. Mr. J. H. Gurney wrote me on the 4th that "nine corncrakes were put up in one barley-field."

Oct. 2*nd.*—I saw a pintail with remarkably rufous tinted plumage, a colouration due probably to its frequenting water impregnated with oxide of iron.

Nov. *29th*—Nine Egyptian geese on Breydon on the 26th. Five were shot by one punt-gunner, and two subsequently were killed by shoulder-guns. Some were fine unpinioned birds. They were, without a shadow of a doubt, escapes. Their owner had only himself to blame for losing them.



ON THE ALERT. PINTAIL, WIGEON, TEAL

1901

Feb. —Between Yarmouth and Caister something like fifty dead puffins were found by a gunner named Quinton. Most of them were immature birds, i.e. birds of the previous year.

May *1st*—Some gulls had been feasting on the fins and other refuse thrown out after some roker (thornback rays) had been cleaned. I noticed that the spiny knobs, white and chalk-like from the processes of digestion, were vomited. I have observed indigestible bones thrown up in the same way by sea-fowl.

June *26th*—Some very young herons feeding on Breydon; this is, I think, the earliest I have ever observed the birds of the year here.

Sept. *22nd*—This month has been remarkable by the great numbers of siskins, pied flycatchers, and redstarts occurring in the neighbourhood.

Oct. 12*th.*—Very low tide to-day. Walked to Ormesby by beach. The Cross sand lying off this village was visible for a long distance; and for a mile of its length it was tenanted by an enormous flock of gulls, probably numbering three thousand. This was certainly a rare experience for the gulls.

„ 27*th.*—Continuous flights of Norwegian larks coming over. Wind, S.W. On this wind most of the migrants came in this year.

Nov. 16*th.*—Wild afternoon.

„ 25*th.*—Twice lately have razorbills, wearied out by the rough weather and seas, been taken alive on the beach, and brought to me. Do what I would, neither birds could be made to feed, even throwing up again pieces of fish forced down their throats.

Dec. 18*th.*—Coots numerous on Breydon; also several redshanks there, a rather unusual circumstance in winter.

1902

Mar. 13*th.*—Sparrows are a perfect pest in the St. George's Park, having found something very much to their liking in the flowers of the yellow crocuses. Row after row have been destroyed, and the petals bestrew the soil. Next to the yellow, the white is favoured with their attentions; the purple variety they let pretty well alone.

May 12*th.*—With the old gunners there was a saying, "Twelfth of May—godwit-day." Gave some time to Breydon to-day, but not a single godwit rewarded my search. *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis!*

June 2*nd.*—Three turnstones, exceedingly late birds on Breydon; a still later oyster-catcher there on June 20th.

„ 30*th.*—Considerable number of greater black-backed gulls on Breydon. Been here some days, and will no doubt remain all summer; they are, without question, non-breeders.

Oct. 30*th.*—During the past week several shore-larks have been taken by bird-catchers.

1903

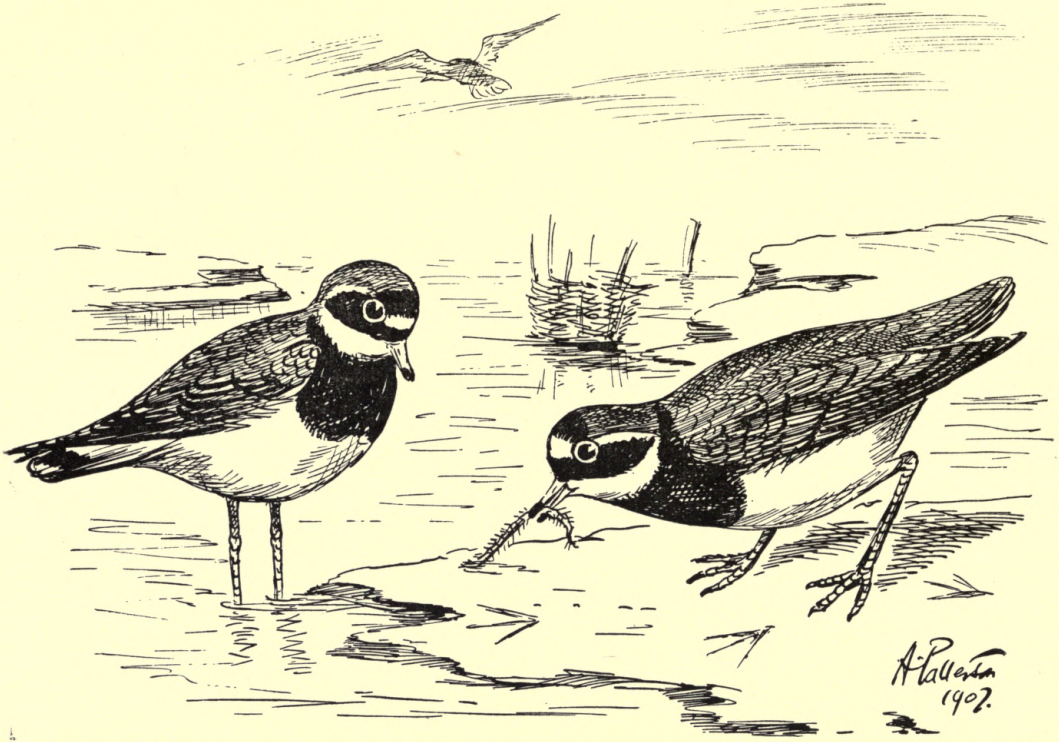
May 6*th.*—Two large flocks of ringed plovers on the mud-flats; one contained fully two hundred birds, the other three hundred. I was so interested watching them that a tremendous downfall of rain overtook me, and forced me to row for shelter, which, fortunately, was not far to seek.

July 6*th.*—Thrushes and blackbirds this season have built in several town gardens, and made themselves very much at home. I saw a blackbird's nest built in a flower-pot, a most unusual procedure; the pot had fallen off a bedroom window-sill and lodged in the fork of an apple tree. Three young birds, becoming well feathered, and more than comfortably filling the rather small nest, paid very little heed to my intrusion, having become fairly confident with my friend's children, who daily came to see them.

„ 18*th.*—The Yarmouth rook is a depraved creature; he delights in carrion, and seeks it from choice when cleaner food might be obtained. I saw this evening the ribs of a deceased dog, bare and clean picked, sticking out of a hole in a sack which had been the poor animal's shroud. The rooks had just vacated their foul meal as I rowed up to see the "joint" on which they were feasting. Query—Did they find this unclean thing by its scent, or were they so familiar with bags containing carrion that they knew what to find inside as soon as a hole had been torn?

1904

Jan. 9*th.*—On this date a paragraph appeared in the *Field* relative to an avocet shot by a Yarmouth gentleman at Aldeburgh, a few miles south of this town. It is a most exceptional circumstance to find an avocet on the east coast in winter. The bird has been preserved and is now in the town.



FEEDING-TIME. RINGED PLOVERS

July 31*st.*—Several kestrels flying about Breydon walls. One young bird, screaming noisily, made a dash at a meadow-pipit, when just as he was within a very short distance of it, a swallow made a feint at him, baffling him, on which he dashed at the *Hirundine*, which was however too quick for him.

Sept. 24*th.*—A Lapland bunting (*Calcarius lapponicus*) taken by a bird-catcher on the North Denes.

1905

April 26*th.*—Nine land dotterel seen on the North Denes.

May 27*th.*—The barn owl is a migratory species; I have seen it in autumn come in straight from sea in the daytime. In spring the species very rarely shows itself in the day. One, however, was observed yesterday flying across St. George's Park, when a swallow dashed at it and considerably upset it. The owl made a stoop at the swallow, which easily enough dodged it; but it continued to harass the owl until it had passed beyond its territory, when the unlucky bird of night was allowed to proceed on its way without further molestation.

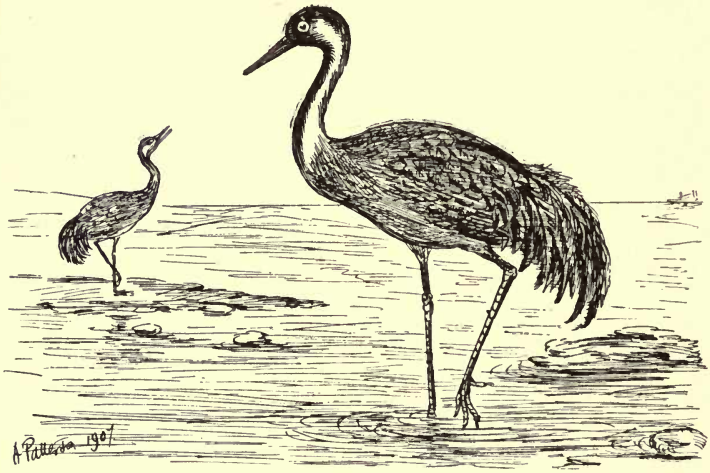
„ 31*st.*—A water-rail, in all probability migrating, struck some telegraph wires in the town and fell into a yard, and was found by a cat, from which it was taken sadly mutilated by wire and claw.

June 15*th.*—A nest of the ringed plover was discovered on the south beach, the eggs being hard set. Two days after the spot was visited, but the "nest-hole" was empty. Mr. B. Dye, who used closely to watch the habits of nesting ringed plovers, states that the earliest nest discovered was on April 19th; the earliest hatching was noted on June 1st.

„ 24*th.*—A flock of about one hundred and fifty young starlings congregated on the marshes; a remarkably early "bunching" of this species.

July 6*th.*—About sixty jackdaws, young and old, searching for grubs on a Bure-side marsh. Most of these were locally-bred birds, at least a score having been hatched in the parish church steeple.

Sept. 28*th.*—After continuous east winds I went to the harbour mouth, thinking that in all probability some unfortunate rock-bird might have been washed ashore. I saw one weary red-throated diver, at which some boys were throwing stones, swimming in a muddled fashion just outside the breakers, and found one dead razorbill and one guillemot among the debris of the tidemark. I also found a Manx shearwater near the breakwater, but it was in too bedraggled a condition for preservation. It is rare here.



THE CRANE

Oct. 7*th.*—Saw a young guillemot deliberately robbing the hooks of the sea-anglers at the Gorleston breakwater; he tackled one hook too many, and greatly to his surprise was landed on the platform.

„ 14*th.*—Saw the first snow-bunting of the season on Breydon walls, feeding on the down-covered seeds of the Michaelmas daisy (*Aster tripolium*). As it sprang up on my approach, two swallows darted at it — an incident which seemed to suggest dislike to the harbinger of approaching winter. As I walked home by the Acle road I passed a yellow wagtail—a rather late stayer.

Nov. 15*th.*—There seems to have been a very pronounced movement of green woodpeckers; they have been plentiful of late. They are usually more in evidence here in November than at any other period of the year.

„ 16*th.*—A male bearded tit was shot at St. Olaves, where, with a companion, evidently a female, it was unexpectedly met with in a clump of reeds. This looks like a return visit to an old-time haunt of the species.

„ 18*th.*—Wild birds frequently live to a great age in captivity. A friend assures me that a linnet of his acquaintance has been caged eighteen years.

1906

Jan. 27*th.*—A flock of snow-buntings feeding on the rain-soaked seeds of the *Chenopodium album* growing on top the walls near my houseboat.

Feb. 7*th.*—Some stacks of hay have been overhauled on the Southtown marshes, much to the delight of bramblings, which have visited the spot in some numbers for the sake of the numerous seeds of weeds exposed to view.

„ 23*rd.*—Saw a concourse of hooded crows on the South Beach. I found their centre of attraction was the carcase of a dead terrier dog. The eyes had been extracted, and the tongue—the daintiest portions; and the fur was stripped off one side as clean as feathers off a plucked chicken.

Mar. 31*st.*—A movement of water-rails has taken place. One brought to me that had been picked up exhausted out of the river; another was recently killed on the North Denes by striking a telegraph wire.

May 12*th.*—Went for my usual "Twelfth of May" Breydon tour, but did not meet with, or hear of, a solitary godwit!

July 9*th.*—Yellow wagtails abundant on some ling-clad hills high above the St. Olaves marshes. Insects were extremely numerous, but not more so perhaps than on the lowlands. It occurred to me that this wagtail may be locally changing its habitat, for it is by no means so numerous as formerly on the marshes around Yarmouth.

July 14*th.*—Saw the crane (at Lowne's) which was shot after two or three days' solitary ramble on the Caister sand-dunes in May. What forbearance and self-restraint local gunners must have exercised to allow it to remain unmolested so long even as that!

Oct. 10*th.*—Extraordinary numbers of larks arrived to-day, coming in just before and until after day-dawn.

„ 27*th.*—The first lot of snow-buntings, frequenting the South Denes.

Nov. 5*th.*—A skua very busy chasing the gulls off Gorleston Pier; species undeterminable, probably a Richardson's.

„ 21*st.*—Very unsettled weather, probably a gale northward. Yesterday lapwings pouring in in wing-weary flocks, seemingly scarcely able to land. With them came over wood-pigeons, larks, fieldfares, etc.

CHAPTER II

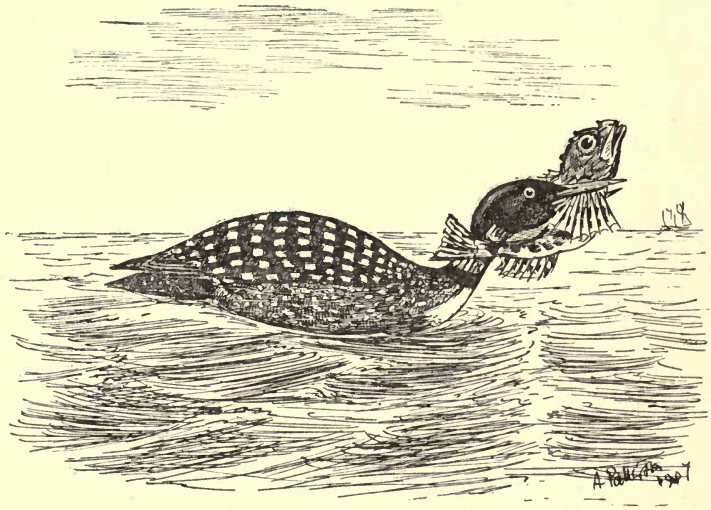
SOME FISH NOTES

THE THREE-SPINED STICKLEBACK

THE Three-spined Stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*) is a sprightly, pugnacious, and sturdy little fellow, game every inch of him, more especially in the early summer months, when he is dressed in his nuptial attire of blue, yellow, and red, and when those "amiable and intense feelings," as Couch aptly terms them, "are stirred into exercise," and the cares of a family devolve upon him. What fun then it is, as one lies sprawled on the grassy margin of a ditch, watching him darting hither and thither in the neighbourhood of his precious nest, now driving from its vicinity, with spines erect and rigid, and glaring eyes, those whom he deems intruders on his domains, and now returning hurriedly to inspect his premises in order to satisfy himself that nothing has happened while his back was turned.

And yet it is just at this period that the human urchin, elate with spring's invigorating impulses, most mercilessly pursues and persecutes him, dragging broken baskets, hung on many-knotted pieces of twine, right through his domains, like so many devastating trawl-nets, and bringing him kicking and protesting to the bank with the tangled and bedraggled debris of his hopes and ambitions heaped around him. Your urchin scarcely gives it a thought that Master "Redbreast's" existence was designed otherwise than to be subservient to his whims and fancies; and with what eagerness does he, after the wild drag and upheaval of the weed-clogged trawl, pounce on the silvery little kicker and drop him, not perhaps without a pricked finger, into the big-mouthed pickle bottle that was clandestinely lifted from the cupboard shelf at home! The stickleback does not tamely submit to close imprisonment with a host of fellow unfortunates without

protest, for he makes his nose sore by many a dash at his prison walls; and he has many a desperate fight with his companions before, smarting and exhausted, he sulkily submits to the situation, and resolves to make the best of circumstances. It is not long ere most of the little victims perish miserably of sour bread crumbs and asphyxiation, the survivors dropping out one by one, until the sturdiest and most vicious of them all is left in solitary state. His prison life is never of long duration, and the boy comes down some



THE ICHTHYOLOGIST. GREAT NORTHERN DIVER

morning to see his "pet" a white, rigid, erect-spined corpse, standing on its head.

Most of the marsh ditches around Yarmouth abound with sticklebacks, save where small and stunted pike eke out a precarious livelihood; you will seldom find the stickleback there, for *Esox lucius* has eaten up every one of them, and now depends chiefly on hapless little frogs which, unaware of its presence, plunge into the ditch for a swim-bath. In clear, clean ditches the stickleback thrives and becomes numerous; even in the shallowest droves may be seen darting away as one's shadow falls on the water. But there are certain ditches on the allotments north of the destructor (between Yarmouth and Caister), where every captured stickleback is

found to be covered with fungoid growths, and in many cases infested with parasites.

Early in August, 1906, I met a lad coming from the allotment ditches with a pickle bottle full of sticklebacks, and knowing that most, if not every fish would be affected by parasitic "spots," I examined them, and found my surmise correct. I begged a couple off him, and placing them in a tube of formalin which I carried, I eventually sent them with other specimens to Mr. Robert Gurney, of Ingham Hall, Stalham, who replied :—

"I am returning your beasts . . . the most interesting of them is the stickleback. I found *Thersites gasterostei* for the first time this year, and thought myself only the second finder in these islands. But I never saw such a crop of them as you have there. I think it is probably quite common if looked for. It is only found under the opercula of fishes. The black spots [that gave the fish a leopard-like appearance] have nothing whatever to do with it, and are probably due to sporozoa (or fungi). I found *Thersites* in the muckfleet [a very dirty stretch of water in the Broads] and the Yare this year."

The stickleback seems quite at home in water absolutely fresh, brackish, or salt, although he does not enter the last-named from choice. He has a habit of congregating at the entrances of the sluice-gates, which are now and again opened to allow of surplus water running into the rivers. There is much food usually gathered there ; and when the gates are lifted, he is carried downstream with the current. This does not greatly inconvenience him ; and I have not infrequently observed shoals on the riverward side of the iron sluice-gates, as if waiting a chance to return. But this does not happen. Many are carried down into the sea, and are probably soon devoured by various marine fishes. I have seen the stickleback drawn ashore with young herrings and kicking about among the seaweeds.

In May, 1906, my small son John brought home some sticklebacks. An example three-parts grown I allowed to remain two days in fresh water. I then took him out and placed him in a tank of sea-water, in which were two whelks, an anemone, and two Risso's crabs (*Xantho rivulosa*) taken from the deep water. He lived here apparently comfortably

enough for five days, without the slightest sign of irritation or inconvenience. Then I fished him out again, and deposited him in an aquarium with three small carp for companions; here he was quite happy and kept them company for some days after, when, if I remember rightly, I gave him his liberty for his good behaviour.

* * * * * *

DOG-FISHES *v.* HERRINGS

The following entry in my notebook is dated October 20th, 1906:—

"Walked to the harbour mouth this afternoon to see what the wind of a day or two previous might have caused to be washed ashore. I found thousands of herrings thrown up by the tide, and spread in a decaying line at least three miles in length. It may be well to mention that a westerly wind causes jetsam to come ashore, whereas an easterly wind drives to the beach such objects as float. I noticed that nine out of every ten herrings showed bites from dog-fishes, packs of which destructive fishes play great havoc with the herrings fast in the net, as well as those swimming in shoals. The dog-fish always bites out pieces very like a Brazil-nut, both in size and shape; now and again the spiny beast himself becomes entangled in the meshes of the net and is drowned, or knocked on the head by the fishermen as they clear the incoming nets."

* * * * * *

STRANDED FISH

One of the delights of the seashore to me is the ever-likely chance of finding queer or interesting creatures thrown ashore by the waves. The little heaps of seaweed shot out of the beachman's draw-net, although, correctly speaking, pitched there by accident, afford one much entertainment in sorting over the small and the juvenile fishes kicking about amongst them, but do not conduce to speculation and deduction as to the relationship of effects with causes. The finding and the condition of the great number of dead herrings already referred to were accidental. I do not think they would have been there but for the onslaughts of the

dog-fishes, and the drawing-in tendencies of the undercurrent attendant on a westerly wind; an easterly wind, flinging up big breakers always "pulls out" jetsam, but drives *floating* objects ashore.

Occasionally fishes are thrown ashore in quite an unexpected manner, and certain fishes seem more liable to this kind of accident than others. The opah is one of these. A deep-bodied, heavy fish, with a comparative insufficiency of fin power, it has been notorious by its proneness, when muddled amongst sandbanks and adverse currents, to end its career on the seashore. One of the first I ever saw was stranded at Caister in October, 1891, after a storm. It weighed fifty-one pounds, was preserved for a local fish merchant, and has recently been placed in the Tolhouse Museum. Unfortunately, it seems impossible to reproduce the magnificent colouration of the living or freshly-dead fish, but the preserver has at least made it passably realistic. This is the fourth specimen, to my knowledge, obtained in the locality, and all of them landed against their will.

The same remarks apply to the Ray's bream (*Sparus niger*), a deep bream-like fish which, when unwittingly wandering amongst the numerous sandbanks, shares the same untimely fate. *Centrolophus pompilus* (the black fish), of which only one specimen is recorded for Norfolk, introduced himself in like manner. I have occasionally seen very immature bass left on the sands by the retreating tide, and could only account for their presence by their having strayed too closely inshore and been drawn in by the undercurrent.

Congers, though not nearly so frequently of late years, were at one time often found on the beach during continuous easterly gales, when a severe frost had obtained; their bladders becoming distended by the severity of the cold, they found themselves incapable of sinking, and so were thrown from billow to billow until landed on the sands. It was a custom in sharp weather for certain perambulators of the beach—old men generally—to take a sack with them in which to drop their finds, and more especially with a hope of falling in with conger eels.

A fair-sized whiting surprised a friend on one occasion by flinging itself on to the beach in front of him, as did quite recently a large squid (*Loligo vulgaris*). In both instances I

feel certain they were fleeing from pursuing codfishes, who are not averse to silvery whiting or the luscious tentacle of a savoury cuttle. In the latter instance my friend touched the squid with his walking stick, when it vomited its ink, making a peculiar gurgling noise. He flung the creature in again, and saw no more of it. I have seen the squid come ashore in a similar manner, and heard that curious vomiting sound as it stained the sand all round it. Occasionally a "round" fish is found that undoubtedly owed its demise to an unfortunate adventure with a sea-angler's hooks. After an exhausting struggle, it had dropped or torn itself off, to be thrown up by the waves ere returning strength had enabled it to hold its own, or it had succumbed to its injuries.

In the old leisurely days of the herring fishery, when "little masters" had an innings, and steam had not come to the fishing fleet to encourage the greed of company mongers, the fishermen had more leisure, being dependent on winds and tides. On breezeless days the boys, finding time hang heavily on their hands, would get what fun they could from bird and fish, sometimes by hooking and in other ways catching the former, at other times by tormenting the latter. The dog-fish, hated for its shark-like ways and appearance, was badly treated. Sometimes the living fish would be turned adrift with corks attached to its tail, so as to be unable to sink again or to control its movements; often it would be disembowelled and flung overboard to perish miserably, while the livers would be cut out of the larger ones for the purpose of making into oil. As a lad I often found these wretched fishes dead among the flotsam, with their misplaced floats still attached to their tails.

* * * * * *

YOUNG HERRINGS

The great spawning-time of our East coast herrings is looked for in the autumn, the "full" fish inshoring to the spawning-grounds in October and November. One would naturally suppose that there would be a well-defined gradation in the sizes of young herrings taken from time to time during the year. I make no comment, but simply state that

I have taken, or found, immature herrings, exactly three inches in length, in the following months: April, May, June, July, August, September, October, and November.

* * * * * *

TWAITE SHAD

Unusual numbers of the twaite shad (*Clupea finta*) were taken in the herring-nets during the autumnal fishing of 1906; they were about the size of the herrings, and several to my knowledge found their way even as far as the "riving" stage of the herring-cure, i.e. after being washed and salted, were handled singly by the "rivers" who "spitted" them (threaded them by the gills on the long sticks or "spits") for hanging up the "loves" for the purpose of being smoked. The twaite shad is easily distinguished, by the seven, eight, or nine spots running along each side of it, from the allis shad (*Clupea alosa*), which has only one spot on the edge of either gill-cover near the pectoral fins.

* * * * * *

MACKEREL ITEMS

I have before referred to the capricious movements of the mackerel (*Scomber scomber*).[1] Some years ago the East coast mackerel-fishing was one of Yarmouth's important industries, the landing and selling on the beach of the beautiful fish affording an interesting and novel sight. Suddenly the mackerel deserted this neighbourhood; but shortly afterwards it appeared in great numbers off the Cornish coast, whither our enterprising boat-owners sent their craft, which for a time were fairly successful. But the 1904 and 1905 voyages were complete failures. Once again, in the spring of 1906, these "dandies" of the sea revisited, in great numbers, their old Norfolk haunts; and with characteristic smartness the Yarmouth boats went quickly after them, the fishing being pursued with energy and profit.

At the conclusion of the fishing, Mr. Jay, the master at

[1] *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, pp. 95–7 and 276–7.

the fish-wharf, kindly allowed me to overhaul his books, which gave me the following facts :—

Last year (1905) very few boats were engaged in the pursuit of the mackerel; this year (1906), however, something like fifty luggers went after them. For May and June the catches totalled 145 lasts; up to June 21st (a last of mackerel numbering 12,000) catches amounted to something like a million and three-quarters of fish. Prices realised as much as eighteen shillings and a pound per hundred, the average being about twelve-and-sixpence. The largest haul of any one boat at one time was a last. One boat earned £250. There were a few trunks of mackerel on the wharf on the 21st, which I saw; but it was then remarked that they then didn't catch enough to feed the crews.

Strange fishes, which we usually expect to find consorting with mackerel, this year were few. Surmullets were taken in small numbers, with a few shads, garfish, scribbled mackerel (*Scomber scriptur*), and salmon-trout. It is my opinion that the mackerel were pursuing the "herring-syle," which swarmed our coast this summer.[1] This, coupled with a continuation of easterly breezes, seemed to suit well the hungry, rollicking characteristics of this jolly fish.

Mackerel were not caught in such numbers during the herring-fishing as in some recent years.

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THE BELLOWS-FISH

There is in the Tolhouse Museum a quaint and extremely rare little fish—the bellows-fish (*Centriscus scolopax*), known sometimes as the sea woodcock and the trumpet-fish. It is a native of the Mediterranean, and is said to be a common species nowhere; it is the merest straggler to the southern coasts of Great Britain, and has, in a very few instances, been cast up on the shore. Day (*British Fishes*) cites only some half-dozen instances of its capture, some of which are open to doubt, as he seems to suggest that the boar-fish (*Capros aper*) may have been mistaken for it. An example of the fish in question was landed at Milford Haven in the latter part of April, 1904, and sent to me by an unknown

[1] In 1905 the herring-syle was remarkably and unaccountably scarce.

friend, who evidently knew of my *penchant* for strange marine creatures.

Couch (*British Fishes*) gives the ordinary size of the fish as from 4 in. to 5 in.; the present example, measuring 7¼ in. in length, must be a fine one. Willoughby is said to have seen examples on sale in the fish-market at Rome, but as the fish, minus its "beak," can be covered by an ordinary envelope, and is only three-fourths of an inch in thickness at its widest part, it speaks much for the economic and microscopic tastes of the Romans. Nevertheless, its flesh is said to be excellent eating, and people who can dine contentedly on insectivorous birds ought to be good judges of its culinary properties. The bellows-fish is undoubtedly a slow swimmer, and probably keeps well to the sea bottom, where it uses the pipe-fish-like end of its long stiff beak to gather tiny crustaceans, entomostracea, and other small marine creatures. Its very limited means of progression may account for its restricted wanderings, and its presence in British waters must certainly be due to tidal influences. Briefly described, the body is covered with small, rough scales, the eyes are exceedingly large, and the body narrow. The fins are small, and the rays of the first dorsal are ornamented with stout spines, the foremost of which is long and immovable, and is probably used as a weapon of offence, and a formidable one it must be. That such a rarity should have been saved from destruction is exceedingly to the credit of my then unknown correspondent.

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A GURNARD'S QUIETUS

Couch's figure and description of the so-called little gurnard (*Trigla pœciloptera*),[1] described also under that name by Yarrell and Thompson, gave me some considerable trouble in trying to localise the species (?), and eventually, to satisfy myself as to its non-existence. Couch gave the length of examples examined by him at 1 in.; and Dr. Lowe, who included it as a species in the Norfolk list,[2]

[1] *British Fishes*, Vol. II, p. 36, Fig. LXX.
[2] *Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society*, 1873.

referred to a specimen obtained by him while trawling in Lynn roads, in May, 1873. Length, $2\frac{3}{4}$ in.

In June, 1890, I obtained from a shrimper a small gurnard answering to Couch's description. This I forwarded to Mr. T. Southwell, with another or two. He replied:—

"NORWICH, 5 *June*, 1890.

"DEAR SIR,—. . . The gurnards you sent me I still think are the *young of* either *Trigla lineata* (the streaked gurnard of Couch) or *T. hirundo* (Couch's tubfish), probably the latter, which both Couch and Yarrell call *T. pæciloptera*, regarding it as a distinct species. On this Day, and I think rightly (so far as I can see), does not agree with them. To settle the matter, if possible, I have sent both the fresh and spirit specimen to Dr. Günther, and asked him his opinion. . . . Will let you know the result."

Mr. Southwell kindly sent me Dr. Günther's reply, which was as follows:—

"The fish are undoubtedly the young of *Trigla gurnardus; hirundo* has longer pectoral fins. There is no European species of *Trigla* of so diminutive a size."

This, then, seems to be a satisfactory settlement of the question; and although my shrimper friends persist in telling me they only find these "small things—which must be real fish" (!), and do not obtain red gurnards of intermediate sizes between three inches and above a foot, I have to assure them the little gurnards and big gurnards are one and the same species.

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A RARE BONITO

(*Scomber thunnina*)

"DEAR SIR,—We have a specimen fish, brought to-day, caught locally, of the mackerel species. Weight about 7 lbs.; fetched rather big price. Call at shop and see me respecting it, either there or market, when I will give you all particulars. . . . It is a handsome specimen. "R. BEAZOR."

"9, 7, '06."

This was the first intimation I received with regard to a fish, which not only afforded myself and several prominent

naturalists considerable interest, but led to the addition of a new species to the British list. While the post card was still in the hands of the postman, I happened to call round at Mr. Beazor's shop and saw the magnificent creature lying in state on the slab in the shop window, interesting a small group of spectators, who ventured many opinions upon it. I at once had the fish photographed by flashlight, hanging it on an easel, tail upwards, for the better display of its fins, and I then sent it off to a bird-stuffer's at Norwich, writing to Mr. T. Southwell, asking him to call round there and see it.

I also made a pen-and-ink drawing of the fish as it lay on my table, and forwarded it to the *Daily Graphic*, erroneously naming it, as I honestly believed it then to be, the plain bonito (*Auxis rochei*), for the nearest approach to it in shape and colouration was the plain bonito in both Day's and Couch's *British Fishes*. Fortunately my drawing was more truthful than my identification, and Mr. Southwell at once noticed the extension of the first dorsal fin. The fish was captured a few miles off Yarmouth by the drifter *Martha*, which was fishing for mackerel, this species having turned up in the local waters this year (1906) in unusual numbers.

Mr. Southwell at first thought it identical with *Pelamys sarda*, but certain markings, which were peculiarly distinct when the fish was first taken, caused some hesitation in our minds, although the first dorsal fin very strikingly corresponded with that of *sarda*. A photograph was submitted to Dr. Günther, but he could not determine the species from it, and suggested that the absence of dark bands along the lower side and the mottled figures on the back pointed to *Auxis*. Fortunately Mr. Southwell, with that desire for exactness and love of correctness so characteristic of him, suggested that the fish should go to the British Museum authorities, so that they might settle the point, and thither it went.

On August 25th I received the following letter from Mr. Southwell:—

"DEAR PATTERSON,—I returned home last night and found your fish, which is none the worse for its journey, also a letter from Mr. Boulanger to the following effect: 'The fish . . . is a most interesting addition to the British

fauna: *Scomber thunnina*, Cuv. (or *Euthyanus allitoratus*, Ray). It is a pelagic fish of almost world-wide distribution, which has been several times taken on the coast of Scandinavia, but never on our coast, so far as I am aware, without making a search in the bibliography.'

"I must therefore congratulate you on turning up a fish, not only new to Yarmouth but to Great Britain. . . . If you do not mind I will send a note to the *Field*, and you had better record it in the *Zoologist*. I saw at once that the fish was of a species of which I had no experience, but I have looked up its history in Day's *Fishes of India*."

Mr. Southwell's note appeared in the *Field* of September 1st. The first half of it covered the ground I have already dealt with, but the latter half may not be considered out of place. He wrote:—

"On turning to Day's *Fishes of India* I find that he figures this species (Plate LIV, fig. 6) under the name *Thynnus thunnina*, and states that it is found in the seas of India to the Malay Archipelago, where it is common during the cold months, and that it is found in the Mediterranean and tropical parts of the Atlantic. Its northern range extends to the Scandinavian seas, and Lloyd in his *Game Birds, etc., of Norway and Sweden* (p. 477), quoting from the *Proceedings of the Royal Academy of Science, Stockholm* (1863), mentions the occurrence of a specimen 2 ft. 9 in. long, weighing 22 lbs., near Malmo, in 1857. Whether others have since been met with in the Scandinavian seas I know not.

"The occurrence of this southern form of a widely distributed family of fishes off our eastern shores in an intermediate but still northern locality is very interesting, and it is quite possible that some of the bonitos, small tunnys, or very large mackerel, which have from time to time been recorded, may have belonged to this species, but falling into less discerning hands than those of Mr. Patterson, they may have passed unrecognised. The Yarmouth specimen was 2 ft. long and weighed 7 lbs."

I am exceedingly pleased to record the capture of this stranger, whose subsequent adventures go to prove that utter absence of selfishness which is characteristic of all good naturalists, and the great care that is exercised in placing species on record in the annals of our county's fauna. The bonito is now in the Tolhouse Museum.

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WHAT FISHES (AND BIRDS) SWALLOW

In December, 1905, some interesting discussion arose in the *Angler's News* with reference to the identity of a fish taken at Folkestone; from its description I at once decided it to be a Müller's topknot (*Zeugopterus punctatus*). After some handing backwards and forwards of sketches, my identification was accepted, although the fish itself did not come into my hands. The correspondence led to a discussion of other phases of fish-life, and "What fishes swallow" made some entertaining reading. "G. G." wrote as follows:—

"SIRS,—With regard to Mr. Patterson's recent letter with the above heading, perhaps the enclosed may furnish an interesting line.

"'In the stomach of a blue shark, captured off the Firth of Forth recently, a boot and a stocking, were found.'

"I think the subject of 'What fishes swallow' very interesting. . . ."

Following this was a letter from Scarborough, which read:—

"DEAR SIRS,—As an angler-naturalist, I read with much interest the notes on uncommon fishes which appear in the *Angler's News* from time to time, and gain much useful information from them . . . as to 'What fishes swallow.' Some years ago I saw a guillemot which had been taken entire out of the stomach of a large cod, and more recently on opening a sprag (as small cod are called here) of 8 lb., which I had caught at Cloughton Wyke, I found in its stomach an entire redwing, a member of the thrush family. The fish was caught in October, during which month the redwings are migrating from Scandinavia to Great Britain, and doubtless the example found had fallen exhausted during its long journey and had been picked up by the fish. I have several times found stones in the stomachs of codfish. An interesting discussion might be opened upon 'What seabirds swallow,' and it appears to me, as an angler, that our seabirds are receiving too much protection, and are becoming far too numerous; the quantity of fish destroyed by them being something enormous. A razorbill, which I shot some time ago, contained in its crop no fewer than 200 tiny whitings, about 170 of which I was able to distinguish separately, the remainder being crushed to pulp. Only a few days ago I saw another bird of the same species struggling with a

large fish, and after watching it overcome and swallow it, I shot the bird in order to see what had happened. I found the fish was a garfish, 13 in. in length, the length of the bird (minus feathers) being about 11 in. The fish was bitten almost in two about the middle and doubled upon itself, thus rendering the apparently impossible quite easy of accomplishment.

"I have seen a cormorant swallow a codling weighing 3 lb., and one of these birds, which I kept for a few days alive, would eat six large herrings a day, and was never satisfied. He would fill himself until the last fish was left protruding[1] from his overflowing gullet, and in about four hours was empty and hungry again. . . .

"W. J. C. (F.Z.S.)

"*January* 13, 1906."

From Folkestone followed another note:—

"DEAR SIRS,—. . . A short while back Mr. Patterson asked as to 'what fish ate'; now my experience has shown me that that depends mostly on the nature of the ground in which one catches one's fish. During the whiting season, and when sprats are also about, it is usual to find that the 'crop' of your whiting is glutted with *Clupea sprattus;* at other times he appears to feed on anything which he can get hold of that is alive, and makes the young 'britt,' which in the spring of the year swim in our bay in myriads, pay a severe penalty for having been born alive. We all know that Mr. and Mrs. Whiting will also feed on the succulent lugworm. . . . The pollack, the pike of the sea, is very much of the same tastes excepting that he prefers 'rag' or 'madder' to lugworm; also a very young cuttlefish is *very much* to his liking. Codfish appear to be very general also in their likes, more catholic than either of the former, for I have found whiting, small pouts, crabs, and other shellfish 'dedans.' . . . On opening a 9-lb conger I discovered a recently-swallowed, hard-shelled crab, at least four inches across his back. He had so recently swallowed it that except for a turn in his lateral formation—no doubt prepared first by Mr. Conger to suit the formation of his 'Little Mary'—he was practically intact. My reason for making a special point of this is that there has been much discussion amongst the 'cognoscenti' 'up above' as to the reason for the scarcity of shellfish [crustaceans?] round our south coast being caused by the captures of large quantities of *Congers*, between this port of Folkestone and the French coast, in consequence of which the *Cuttlefish* and *Squid* have increased in such numbers that

[1] Vide *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, pp. 74–6.

they have kept down the increase of crabs and lobsters, to whom they are natural and deadly enemies. It is, of course, possible that *my* conger knew something of this (he looked a knowing old bird), and was trying what *retaliation* would effect.

"This is a question for our lords and masters of the Upper House, whose opinion and verdict we look for. . . .

"G. C."

"Walton, A. R. M., jun.," wrote:—

"SIRS,—One day my father and I were returning from a little fishing excursion at Cromford, near Matlock Bath, in Derbyshire. On reaching the well-known fish-pond by the roadside, I threw into it a large dandelion which I had gathered in the Cromford meadows, and in a second a big chub came up and swallowed it, and several other chub did the same thing with other dandelions. It may be interesting to state that on the side of this pond there were several automatic machines from which, if you inserted a penny in the slot, you would receive some cheese to throw to the chub."

One "fact" in particular I tried to ascertain during the correspondence, but there was no response—had any one ever detected the codfish devouring its own species? Whitings I know have no scruples in the matter of devouring any relative they can swallow; but in my experience I never found a small codling in the stomach of a larger one. Many a fine cod too have I seen "dissected"; and among the many queer things found were huge masses of whelk's egg-cases; but these had never been engulfed by the cod itself, but had been crammed into its maw by wily fishermen, in order to give that plump appearance so desirable in freshly-caught cods.

A friend of mine once took from a cod's stomach a fisherman's pocket-knife; and from the maw of another a good-sized turnip.

LESSER FORKBEARD AND MONTAGU'S SUCKER

The study of our British fishes will, I fear, never be really popular except with those who do business in the deep. It may be that the uncertainty of meeting with the fishes, and the difficulty of watching their habits, as may ornithologists in the case of bird-life, tend to damp enthusiasm, although I

feel convinced that were a beginning made intelligently and determinedly, many who now ignore the subject, although perhaps living in localities favourable for ichthyological pursuits, would find it interesting and pleasing. I myself like it for the difficulties that have to be surmounted; and the amount of speculation and deduction to be drawn from casual happenings in no way lessens my interest. Every naturalist has at least some small chance of adding to our store of knowledge; and if the making of local lists and working out the faunas of localities be too great a task, at least the recording of rare species, in any branch of natural science, should be esteemed a duty.

The above reflections are suggested by a note I received in March, 1906, which dealt with the finding of a rare Yarmouth fish, the occurrence of which I did not record in my list of species.[1] "J. T. F." wrote: "I am now reading with much interest your *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*. . . . I know and remember most of the scenes which you describe, and enjoy their being recalled. . . . I recall one of my Natural History observations . . . this relates to a fish, the lesser forkbeard (*Raniceps trifurcatus*). I used occasionally to watch the draw-nets emptied on the beach, and in passing where one had recently been drawn, to stop and examine the fish which had been rejected. On a day in January, 1861, my brother (now Col. R. F.) and I came upon a few of these rejected fish south of the Wellington pier. We selected one which was strange to us and took it home, and through Yarrell (2nd edit.) we established it as the lesser forkbeard. I preserved it in spirit, and kept it here for about forty years, and then presented it to the Norwich Museum, where it may now be seen. I think its length is about 8 in. Yarrell believed that no example had been obtained elsewhere than the Cornish coast, except one at Berwick-on-Tweed, and it seems that mine may probably be the earliest recorded Norfolk example, or perhaps the second for the whole east coast, though no doubt it is only the capture of this fish which is of such extreme rarity, and its existence is more common than any evidence would lead us to suppose. I should observe that the fish was still living when I picked it up. The only other fish of the least interest which I chanced

[1] Vide *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, p. 290.

to discover in the same way was Montagu's sucker, two, which I found on the beach on another similar occasion. I saw the net drawn with them ; they were clearly identified and preserved, but I do not know where they are now."

Now had these Montagu's suckers been properly recorded, my claim to being the first observer to add the species to the Yarmouth list would have been superseded. With the exception of these two, whose history has now turned up in an unexpected fashion, I knew of no others taken off this coast until the spring of 1904,—a period of over forty years. This makes my contention good, when I say that the records of any rare species are interesting and useful, as adding to our store of knowledge.

The Montagu's sucker (*Liparis montagui*) is referred to by Dr. Lowe[1] as common in the Norfolk estuary. He says, "I have frequently taken this, which is much more common here than the preceding (*Liparis vulgaris*), in the estuary, and several times in the river opposite Lynn, in fresh water at low tide."

In May, 1906, it came to hand from the Yarmouth shrimp boats in sufficient numbers for me to believe it by no means uncommon off this coast. Some I saw contained spawn which was, proportionately, of a very large size.

The lesser forkbeard has been recorded several times for the Norfolk estuary (Day). Couch refers to one obtained by a Mr. Gatty, F.L.S., at Yarmouth, but gives no date of its occurrence. It would seem strange that, between that example and the one mentioned by "J. T. F." as taken in 1861, none should be recorded until 1891, in which year I obtained two, taken in shrimp-nets, while a third was washed up after a gale in November, 1902.

Day speaks of it as "apparently solitary and probably a wanderer," and, quoting Ogilby, states that the "curious fact of this fish being generally washed ashore dead, would seem to prove that it lives at the bottom in very deep water, where neither nets nor lines can be used, and where it is perhaps not so rare as is supposed."

It would be interesting to know at what depth the influences of a storm are felt ; and to know *why* this deep-sea species should be subject to these influences. The fact of two being

[1] *Trans. Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society.*

taken in shrimp-nets proves that it occasionally wanders into shallow waters.

Altogether the inferences to be drawn from the fork-beard's appearances are interesting, to say the least of them; and without putting "two and two" together to make "four," its habits might be left in doubt altogether.

There is much yet to be learnt of the comings and goings of many fishes.

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SOLES NUMEROUS

The sole appears to come into the roadstead fairly regularly in June and July. A more than usual quantity of fair-sized fish were met with in 1906. A dozen of my shrimper friends at the latter part of June substituted small trawls for their ordinary shrimp-dredges, and made remunerative hauls. I saw fifty-six pairs of soles, some of them fine ones, in a shrimp shop on July 5th, the combined catch of two boats using 16 ft. beam trawls. Some of these fishers "fish hard"; they crowd on all sail, and throw out a "drag"—a sail held by a pole and four guy-ropes—which the tide fills like a huge bag, pulling the boat along from below in addition to the sails above.

The soles, so far as I can ascertain, inshore for lugworms and take the *Nereidæ* freely, although showing little or no food in their stomachs when dissected. Most of the shrimpers who retain their dredges meet with a few soles. "Lucky Bob," who occasionally trawls on Breydon, assured me that he took there, on July 4th, no less than thirty-two pairs of soles. His largest fish measured 22 in.; Jary, the watcher, recorded one 18 in. long.

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SHOALS OF GREY MULLET

The movements of the grey mullet, if the statements of old Breydoners may be relied on, were at one time well ordered and exceedingly regular, while the capture of this fish was a remunerative part of the men's employment.[1]

[1] Vide *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, pp. 191–3; and *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, pp. 284–5.

To-day the grey mullet's movements are capricious; and there can be no doubt that the few stragglers which come to this estuary keep chiefly to the channel, or the edges of the flats bordering on it. I have been given to understand that great numbers used to go round the river to Oulton, where they would congregate at one of the locks, probably to feed on the *Palæmon varians*, which would be found there in quantities; and where one of the lock-keepers kept by him a home-made spear with which now and again he secured one or more of them.

Huge numbers appear to put in on the south coasts; and some correspondence on the subject, to which I contributed, may be worth preserving. In the *Angler's News* of February 24th, 1906, appeared the following:—

"A GREAT HAUL OF GREY MULLET

"Salcombe . . . was on Monday all agog with excitement, owing to the arrival of enormous numbers of grey mullet. The fishermen at once went after them, and Mr. Wm. Cove writes me that his net accounted for 14½ cwt. of fish, which averaged from 2 lb. to 3 lb. Writing on Tuesday, he adds, 'Now there is another shoal of about two tons, which we are trying to get.'"

It would be interesting to know what caused the sudden appearance of these immense shoals of mullet here. Were they attracted by food, driven in by large predatory fish or gales, or do mullet spawn hereabouts?

At Yarmouth the belief seems to have been that they came up-river, like the smelts, to spawn; but seeing that this species spawns in the winter months, as rather curtly referred to by Day,[1] its visits here must certainly have been for the sake of the food found on Breydon—the *Ulva lactuca*, and the small *Hydrobia* clustering upon it—and not for spawning. The probability is that it was for spawning purposes this great shoal came to our southern coasts.

I replied to this note, and gave an account of the habits of the species so far as I had observed them in this neighbourhood. A note followed from Mr. Cove, the fisherman referred to, to the effect that "they (the mullet) are chased—the same as the hounds after the hare—by porpoises. We

[1] *British Fishes*, Vol. I, p. 231.

think that the mullet feed on the insects [crustacea?] which are among the seaweed, but we cannot tell exactly. The shoal of about two tons, which I mentioned last week, is still in view, but are driven about by the porpoises, and we cannot catch them yet."

"G. C.," continuing the correspondence, wrote: "I think the reason that the grey mullet has extended their visit to the Devonshire coast is the mildness of the past winter. I have a strong conviction that this fish attaches itself to locality. When the *Mabel Grace* was making the passage daily between this port (Folkestone) and Boulogne, a school of mullet was invariably to be seen disporting round about her, more especially when the warm water was emptied from the condensers, and any that were caught on pollack tackle from the pier-head were always taken shortly after she had left the harbour, which would indicate that they had followed her to beyond the pier-head, and were taken on the return journey to within the shelter of the harbour-pier extension."

To me the following of a steamer seems rather curious, unless the mullet did so for the sake of the grease that would naturally drain into the sea from such a craft. Day speaks of it as "delighting in shallow water during the warmer weather, snatching at any oily substance that may chance to be floating about." When sailing vessels, coming in after long voyages, were not so rare in Yarmouth harbour as they are to-day, the barnacles and other marine creatures, which were often very much in evidence on their bottoms, would occasionally lure unexpected fishes into the harbour.

That grey mullet will eat larger morsels is proved by one being taken with a mussel, and another, as recently as November, 1906, on a hook baited with lugworm, although in each case I believe the fish was foul-hooked, the barb of the hook having entered the soft lips of its small mouth without the whole being taken.

The grey mullet's fondness for small mollusca is proved by Couch's list of shells (quoted from Thompson[1]), which includes *Mytilus edulis*, *Modiola papuana* (small examples), *Littorina retusa*, *Rissoa labiosa*, *R. parva*, etc.

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[1] *Natural History of Ireland*, Vol. IV.

SALMON-TROUT

During the latter part of September, 1906, the coast was visited by an unusual number of salmon-trout, the 'long-shore fishermen at Winterton, a favourite resort occasionally of the species, bringing some excellent catches to the fish-wharf. In two days as many as ten stones were brought up, the larger fish realising a shilling a pound. Mr. R. Beazor, fish merchant, informed me that the catches were much greater than usual; he himself purchased over 1000 lb. of trout, dispatching most of them to London. One fine example weighed 16¼ lb.; several between that weight and 12 lb. were amongst them. The greatest number was landed on September 29th, the season closing on October 2nd.

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THE PEARLSIDES

The finding of an example of the pearlsides (*Maurolicus pennantii*) stranded up-river nearly four miles from the harbour mouth, by my friend Mr. J. E. Knights, is worthy of being recorded. An unusually high tide overflowed the banks of the River Bure at several weak spots, not far from the town. Near the new railway bridge, spanning the river, a considerable inrush of water filled the adjoining ditches, coming in like a mountain torrent. Some days after Mr. Knights visited the spot, and found an example of this silvery little creature lying on the bank at the edge of a gully, formed by the torrent of water that had forced its way through. The fish was 1¾ in. in length. I saw it with its two rows of abdominal spots still vividly coloured, although it was somewhat shrivelled.

I may be wrong, but I am strongly inclined to believe that this species, allied as it is to the *Salmonidæ*, ascends rivers in spring for the purpose of spawning. All the occurrences I have noted[1] for this neighbourhood were between February 24th and April 1st. Owing to its diminutive size it is seldom netted, for the mesh must be fine indeed that stays its progress; although, as in the case of the first one, which I discovered at the harbour mouth, it had come ashore entangled in the abundant weeds clogging a net.

[1] See *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, p. 297.

A DEEP-SEA LING

When passing a fishmonger's on November 7th, 1906, I observed a big-eyed, attenuated-looking ling. I remarked to the fishmonger on its distinctive appearance, and he laughingly replied: "Yes, that's one of them old deep-sea customers;" which not only proved to me that he was fairly conversant with the fish, but also suggested at once the locality from which it was taken. On turning up an old copy of the *Field* I was delighted to come across an article on *Deep-Sea Fishes in the Market*, by J. T. Cunningham, and at once saw the similarity of a drawing of the fish to the example I had recognised. Mr. Cunningham's remarks on it are as follow:—

"*Molva elongata*, Otto.—This is a species of ling characterised by the slender form, the elongation of the pelvic fin, which extends beyond the pectoral, and the shortness of the first dorsal. The lower jaw is longer than the upper. The colour is ashy grey on the back, silvery on the sides. The specimen I have examined is 31 in. long, but the fish is probably often larger, though it does not reach so large a size as the common ling. This species closely resembles a northern deep-sea species of ling, the *M. abyssorum* of Nilsson, *M. byrkelange* of Walbaum. The latter occurs at depths beyond 100 fathoms on the coast of Norway, and was discussed a few years ago by Mr. Holt, who obtained specimens from the lining grounds off Faroe, and from Iceland, where it is taken both by line and trawl. The chief differences between *Molva elongata*, for which Mr. Garstang suggests the English name silver ling, and *M. byrkelange*, are that the first dorsal fin is shorter in the former, and that the pelvic fin is longer than the pectoral. M. Adolphe Cligny, of the Station Aquicole of Boulogne, who has published a memoir on the deep-sea fishes obtained by French trawlers on these grounds, considers *elongata* as merely a variety of *byrkelange*, but he omits from his discussion the fact that in the former the pelvic (ventral) is longer than the pectoral, and not in the latter. It is of little importance whether the forms are considered to be varieties or species; there is no doubt that they can be definitely distinguished *M. elongata* was until recently only known from the Mediterranean, but it has been recorded by Portuguese observers from the coast of Portugal. There is no doubt that it is a good edible fish."

The example I saw was about thirty inches in length. It

did not long remain unnoticed by customers, and its "remainders" were sold at night in a fried condition, with many another species.

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THE VIPER WEEVER

During the summer and autumn of 1906 the numbers of the lesser weever (*Trachurus vipera*) taken in draw-nets and trawls, both on the coast and on Breydon, were in excess of those of any year I can remember. It may be that this phenomenally fine and warm period accounted for their abundance, as it undoubtedly did for the vast numbers of herring-syle then found present in local waters. I have heard several persons speak of the painful consequences of contact with its ugly dorsal fin, although I have only known one or two seriously injured by it. No mercy is ever shown it on capture.

I had never satisfactorily understood why the spines of this fish should be poisonous, and in certain instances I had concluded that there was a probability of the fish having come in contact with decaying animal matter owing to its habit of grovelling on the sea-floor. But at a meeting of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists in November, 1906, some interesting information on this point was forthcoming. Dr. H. Muir Evans, of Lowestoft, sent in a short paper on "Weever Sting, or *Trachinus* Venom"; and Mr. J. O. Barley, M.A., gave an account of the structure of the poison apparatus of the weever. The following is a condensed notice of these two communications, which were of more than local interest:—

"There are two British species of weever, *Trachinus draco*, the greater weever, and *Trachinus vipera*, the less. The poison apparatus in both is the same. In each it consists of poison glands, resembling sebaceous glands, in relation with grooved spines. These spines are: (1) Those of the dorsal fin, which is coloured black, probably as a 'warning' to other fish to prevent them biting. This fin, as the creature lies buried in the sand, is seen alone. (2) The opercular spine is more interesting. It has the form of a dagger, grooved along each edge, each groove containing a pear-shaped gland. The secreting cells of each gland are very

large, elongated, and arranged in columns. They give rise to an apparently colloidal and a granular substance, though whether these are successive stages of the same secretion or two separate secretions is unknown. There is no muscular arrangement for ejecting the venom."

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AN EEL CATASTROPHE

In July, 1905, one of the strangest and most destructive fatalities to eels I have ever known occurred to those in the waters of East Norfolk. The first intimation I received of it was by a post card dated July 19th, to the effect that

"On Sunday three rods got never a bite all day (at St. Olaves). But there are scores of dead eels floating in the river, all in about the same stage of decomposition. The 'salts' generally get the blame. Eels didn't ought to mind salt water. I only saw one other dead fish—a roach.

"P. E. R."

I went to see what was the matter with the fishes, and at first came to a wrong conclusion. Part of a letter I wrote to the county paper read as follows:—

"SIR,— . . . On a ramble round last Saturday from Reedham and Haddiscoe to St. Olaves, I noticed several dead eels floating in the river, and, without giving much thought to the matter, concluded they had been pitched out of the eel-babbers' stow-boxes; it is their practice to place their catches in floating trunks until a certain time, or when sufficient numbers tempt them to return and sell their wares to the wholesale buyers. In these 'trunks' there are usually weak and dying eels to be found; and as a dead eel is 'a fly in the ointment' and soon decomposes, over it goes. Eels herein die from the results of pick-stabs, hook-swallowing, and such-like. But the numbers reported by various folks at different places, and the fact of the majority being big eels—some up to two pounds in weight, as our Yarmouth ferryman assures me—must certainly point to something beyond ordinary accidents. Can it be that the recent hot weather has affected them in some way or other? I should be greatly interested in hearing whether this dead-eel business has been more than local."

A few days later a letter appeared signed "Triton," who wrote :—

"SIR,—No explanation on the problem of the dead eels referred to by Mr. Patterson appears to be forthcoming, and as the subject has an interest for a great many, and has certainly been much speculated about, may I observe as follows: Like Mr. Patterson, I was recently at St. Olaves, and noticed a lot of 'corpses' of eels travelling up and down on the tides, and the same phenomenon appeared at Cantley on moving my boat thither; a few fish also were 'turned up' at the latter place. Sailing up to Bramerton, I was told that many dead fish had been floating about the river. The fish give, I think, the clue to the mystery (if it ever was one), for an old eel-catcher, whom I consulted, at once observed, 'I consate 'tis the sewage.' Those who saw no dead fish reasonably enough would not concede that sewage caused the mischief, but advanced ingenious theories of electricity, the eels getting into hot water, etc.

"Probably the Norwich authorities have been employing that grand natural drain, the River Yare, once more. If it is not so, let the negative be given to the suggestion. Cannot Mr. Patterson co-operate with the responsible authority at Norwich to gradually accustom our fish and eels to a scientific diet of sewage? Surely this should not be impossible to the intelligence which of late years has choked the Norwich river with weeds."

"Holiday Maker," referring to this subject in the *Angler's News*, said :—

"DEAR SIRS,—I have just returned from a yachting cruise on the Broadland waters, and whilst away I noticed in the Norfolk papers some remarks respecting the large number of eels which have died in the River Yare, etc. Now I think the cause as put forth by a Norwich writer, that the sewage matter entering the river poisons the eels, is wrong, although this is corroborated by a well-known naturalist. Firstly, because, although the eels are lying dead in the reeds in hundreds, there is no marked mortality among other fish—roach, bream, etc.—just an occasional fish being turned up here and there. Secondly, it is well known that eels thrive near sewers and filth, and that they do not get poisoned. I think the writer really meant refuse from chemical works, or something of the kind. But I want to let you know what I have seen. My trip has been to Wayford Bridge, up the Ant, a tributary of the Bure. Well, there are no chemical works, no sewers, or anything else of

that nature there, and yet we sailed past eels turned up in vast numbers—in fact, in some places we had to give up the counting. I made many inquiries as to the cause of the eels dying off, and the major portion pronounced it to be the warmth of the water, and nothing else. One or two of the oldest inhabitants have recollections of something happening many years ago. No salt water has been up, and I am informed that, although the salt causes the eels to vomit, they are none the worse for it. . . . I may say that a friend of mine also saw thousands of dead eels in the Waveney, between Beccles and Yarmouth."

My next letter to the *Angler's News* was as follows :—

"DEAR SIRS,—I was interested in 'Holiday Maker's' letter. . . . Eels in Norfolk waters have 'turned up' and died by thousands, some of them fine fellows.

"These fatalities occur only at long intervals. . . . The fact of them 'turning up' in the Bure, and high up there too, goes to prove that to sewage and chemical waste all the fatalities cannot be due. After a number of inquiries I have come to the conclusion that *asphyxiation*, from the effects of the great heat upon the mud in which they delight to lay and the decay of vegetable matter, has had most to do with it. The mud *stinks!* The decayed vegetation assists that stench; and eels are peculiarly sensitive creatures, although it is said they do not mind a temporary bit of burrowing into a decomposing corpse. How soon they will 'turn up' in a floating eel-trunk the eel-babbers know, and watch for sickly tenants almost hourly in the busiest season; a dead eel soon goes wrong, and spoils its living fellows. A dirty scum has risen to the surface, and streaked white-painted yachts with an offensive and filthy banding; and it is a pretty good indication of the fermentation going on in the shallows below. A few good rains are badly wanted."

For several days the rivers, especially where bordered by reeds, presented a gruesome sight, the floating bodies of the eels being threaded in and out among the stems; and weeks elapsed before the last traces of them had vanished. The summer of 1905 was an exceptionally hot one, with few tides of any strength; in fact, they remained abnormally low for a long period, thus creating the disaster and nuisance, and in no way helping to abate the unpleasantness of it. The eel-catching season of 1906, more especially on Breydon, and in the lower reaches of the rivers, was a complete failure.

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THREE HOOKS—FOUR FISH

Calver, an old-time Breydoner, whose name is still frequently mentioned in connection with a "drain" he once cut in the mudflats, and which has since deepened and lengthened considerably, once set three night lines at a sluice near the seven-mile carr, on the Beccles River; and going to them next morning found, to his great surprise, three eels and a pike fast thereon. The pike had been prowling around, and evidently looking upon one of the eels as an easily procured supper, had seized it. But the eel was not to be so easily settled by *Esox lucius*, through whose gills it forced itself, and coming out under the gill-cover, literally strung the unfortunate pike on the line, whereon, between the eel and a stake thrust into the margin of the bank, it was kept a prisoner.

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LARGE SMELTS

In the spring and autumn catches of smelts (and at other seasons in the year) large specimens are occasionally met with. The following are some examples:—

Jan.	14th,	1890.	Ex.	11	in.	long;	5	in. girth;	5 oz. weight.
„	20th,	„	„	11½	„		5¼	„	5¾ „
Apl.	22nd	„	„	11	„		5¾	„	6 „
			„	11	„		—	„	7 „
„	20th,	1891	„	12	„		—	„	6 „

CODS' FOOD

At one time, when large cods were frequently taken on long lines in this neighbourhood, it was a favourite amusement of mine to beg the stomachs from the various fishmongers and sort over the contents. It is surprising what a variety of species, and a number of them, a cod will gather and pack into his maw. I have found several herrings in one, fresh as when taken out of the water; indeed, I have seen such herrings sold as fresh fish! I have found seventeen Norwegian lobsters in one cod's maw; and various species of crabs in others.

THE SUNFISH

So far as I can ascertain, the oblong sunfish (*Orthagoriscus truncatus*) has not yet been recorded for the East Anglian seaboard, although specimens have been taken off the north-east of Scotland and also off the south-west coast of England. The short sunfish, however, has been several times recorded for East Norfolk, the last brought into Yarmouth, to the best of my knowledge, being one that had entangled itself in the herring-nets belonging to a Scotch boat sailing out of this port. This was in October, 1905. The arrival of this luckless and by no means handsome stranger caused much comment, and provoked considerable speculation among the fish fraternity haunting the fish-wharf as to its name, habits, etc. I heard of its capture on the day it was landed, but was unfortunately unable to visit the wharf that day; it was snapped up by some daring purchaser for four shillings, and dispatched to a London fish-shop to serve as a "draw" for customers, afterwards, no doubt, closing its career in the refuse box.

As soon as I made my appearance on the fish-wharf quite a number of fishing-folk surrounded me and sought my opinion upon it, one man actually leading me to a rough pencil drawing limned on one of the fish-merchants' office boards, and much humorous and dialectic argument followed; but every one was perfectly satisfied when I made a correctly drawn lightning sketch of the fish in question, wherein the sunfish's huge dorsal and anal fins were placed astern of it, and the odd "little buttonhole" of a mouth depicted at the other extremity.

"That's it to a T!" said more than one; and "I told you, 'bor, *he'd* tell you what it wor!" said another. My drawing and a short extempore "lecture" left them all knowing something more about the beast, and all good-humouredly satisfied. By such means has one to arouse a little interest in strange creatures that come to their notice.

In October, 1892, Mr. T. Southwell, when writing to me with regard to sunfishes taken off the East coast, made mention of several captures, remarking, however, that he was not

sure that his was a complete list. The following are well-authenticated instances :—

1667. Mr. Southwell's rendering of Sir Thomas Browne's account of this fish is thus quaintly given :—[1]

"Sometimes wee meet with a mola or moonefish so called from some resemblance it hath of a crescent in the extreme part of the body from one finne unto another one being taken neere the shoare at yarmouth before breake of day seemed to shuier & grunt like an hogge as Authors deliuer of it the flesh being hard and neruous it is not like to afford a good dish but from the Liuer wch is large white & tender somewhat may bee expected the gills of these fishes wee found thick beset with a kind of sealowse. in the yeare 1667 a mola was taken at monsley wch weighed 2 hundred pound."

1821. "One taken November, 1821." (Paget's *Sketch of the Natural History of Great Yarmouth*, 1834.)

1835. One from Yarmouth, now in the Wisbech Museum.

1836. November 13. Example from Overstrand Beach, recorded in Miss Gurney's Diary.

1843. An 18-in. example taken off Overstrand.

1850. November. Two at Lynn and one at Salthouse.

1863. October. One at Lynn.

1865. Thornham. Example 4 ft. 3 in. from nose to tail; from tip to tip of fins, 6 ft.; weight, 210 lb. Recorded in the *Field*, January 7th, 1865.

1887. September. One at Yarmouth.

1892. In first week in October one was stranded in the River Nene at Sutton Bridge.

1896. September. I obtained a small specimen which had been captured in a "dydle," or large hand-net, over the side of a trawler. The fish measured 18 in. in length, and 2 ft. 4 in. from the extremity of the dorsal to that of the anal fin. Weight, 10 lb.!

1900. On September 5th a 2-ft. example was taken in Yarmouth Roads.

1906. December. The following is a paragraph, date uncertain, from a local paper: "A sunfish has been washed ashore upon the beach at Bacton, and as it was in a distinctly game condition, was ordered to be buried by the custom-house authorities. . . . They reach a considerable size, and have occurred from time to time along our seaboard."

There are few 'things natural' over which greater mis-

[1] *Natural History of Norfolk*, edited by T. Southwell, F.Z.S.

takes are made than fishes. Exaggeration of size and weight is not a failing confined to those who angle, and who make gross mistakes, undoubtedly, more through ignorance than by design; but many persons who meet with curious sea monsters seem utterly without a sense of proportion, and many guess the weight of a specimen far above or below what it actually is. Instances of this occur in reports received by Dr. Day in his *British Fishes*, and in the *Field* as above. The reader may compare a sunfish, recorded by Dr. Day, measuring 4 ft. from snout to tail and 8 ft. across the fins, which weighed between 300 and 400 lb., with the measurement and weight given of the fish taken in 1865.

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JAGO'S GOLDSINNY

On June 5th, 1906, one of my shrimper friends brought me an example of the Jago's goldsinny (*Ctenolabrus rupestris*), which had hitherto been unrecorded for Norfolk. It measured about 3 in. in length, and at first sight greatly resembled those white and almost colourless examples sometimes seen amongst goldfish. The black spot stood out boldly and well defined on the upper part of the caudal fin, at its juncture with the body, and at once attracted attention. Details regarding its habits seem to be bare and meagre; living in deep water, it does not appear to be taken except by the merest accident in some crab-pot, although occasionally indulging in nibbling at the fishers' baits. Dr. Day gives it a bad report from a gastronomic point of view, stating that it has "flesh bad, soft, insipid, foul smelling, of a greenish colour"; but its reputation in this respect matters but little owing to its diminutive size. According to Day, it generally comes under notice through being stranded after heavy gales upon various parts of the coast. The above-mentioned example is now in the Tolhouse Museum.

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TOPKNOTS, MEGRIMS, AND WITCHES

I noticed the following paragraph in the *Angler's News* of December 29th, 1906:—

"The columns of the *Angler's News* for near upon two months this year contained correspondence which resulted from the capture of a 'megrim' or 'witch' at Folkestone. Before that many sea anglers were in blissful ignorance of either of these denizens of the deep, yet they must be common enough in some parts. Take the North Sea, for instance. During the years 1903–5 nearly 20,000 cwt. were caught in this sea and landed by steam trawlers on the East Coast. During the same period, and from the same grounds, 51,000 cwt. of 'witches' were landed."

The correspondence referred to began in the first week in January, 1906, over the capture of an innocent little Müller's topknot (*Zeugopterus punctatus*) captured on the previous Boxing Day at a sea-angling contest on Folkestone Pier. In the report of the competition appeared the following remarks:—

"In the meantime there were a few incidents to break the monotony and strain of six hours holding on [exciting sport!]. Mr. Clarke, the proprietor of the local West End Photographic Co., brought down his tripod and camera, and took some interesting pictures, also a clever photo of a 'megrim' which fell to the rod of Capt. H. I give the local name of this freak, which is really a mule or bastard fish, between brill, sole, dab, and plaice; to all appearance it might have been a cross between a sole, brill, flounder, or sand-dab and a rockling. . . ." Some other high-flown descriptive matter as to colouring, etc., was added to the above.

I at once replied, expressing astonishment at the remarkable description given to the little stranger, and assured the readers of the *Angler's News* that there was a true species known as the megrim or scald-fish, to which, among other Latin synonyms, was added the generally accepted name of *Arnoglossus laterna;* and giving details, as far as known, of its habits and peculiarities.

The report of a meeting of the British Sea Anglers' Society, among other matters, included information with regard to the exhibition of the fish: "Mr. Boyton sub-

mitted a fish very rare on the east coast, *Zeugopterus punctatus*—the Whiff or Topknot, Little Harry—in Cornwall the Brown Fluke. It was certainly the finniest fish ever produced to the members—it was completely edged by fin. The tail even had two little fins; the prognathous lower jaw was a very marked feature. It was accompanied by a very nicely executed water-colour sketch."

The next stage in the discussion was a letter of mine on January 13th, giving a full description of the Müller's topknot, with a pen-and-ink sketch, which was reproduced. Other letters for and against my "finding" appeared in subsequent issues, signed "G. C.," "W. C. N.," and "W. J. C." The photograph was sent for my inspection, which proved at once, and conclusively, that the fish in question was no other than the Müller's topknot. This, on January 20th, I emphatically asserted in the same paper.

Mr. W. J. Clarke, F.Z.S., of Scarborough, identified the fish from my sketch, and wrote an interesting letter upon it, dealing with its local status as follows:—

". . . . Mr. Patterson's excellent sketch represents Müller's topknot (*Zeugopterus hirtus*[1]), a fish which turns up in the trawls at Scarboro' every now and then—not commonly, but sufficiently so as to have earned for itself from the fishermen the local name of 'velvet fish,' from the peculiarly velvety feeling of the upper surface if stroked from head to tail. If rubbed the reverse way the skin is rough and file-like, owing to the numerous small tubercles upon the scales pointing from head to tail. . . . Many thanks for allowing me to see the photo [subsequently sent him] of the fish taken at Folkestone. I think there is no doubt that it is Müller's topknot. . . . I should imagine the capture of this species upon a hook to be of unusual occurrence. I have not before heard of one so taken; all the specimens I have seen having been trawled."

"W. C. N.," in a letter on January 27th, very properly complained of the Babel of names given to one and the same and every species. He wrote:—

"Before leaving the *Zeugopterus punctatus* I must remark, alas! another name, *Z. hirtus*, and what seems to hurt us most are its half-dozen or more *aliases*. What a pity it seems that our naturalist friends responsible for this are not more in agreement."

[1] One of its many Latin synonyms.—A. H. P.

Referring to this superabundance of *latinities*, I replied as follows :—

". . . Let me say that I cannot help every European naturalist picking his own pet Latin name for the self-same fish. I suppose each one thinks his own the only correct and best one. Hence, when such small fry as myself have to sort over these names for our own lists, we usually pick which suits us best, although I prefer to be guided by him who is the standard authority of the time, and at present that man is the late Dr. Day."

The winding-up of a very animated and interesting correspondence upon the topknot, a fish which one might have covered with one hand, was reached on February 10th, when a wire from "G. C." to the *Angler's News* was announced as follows :—

"Representing Folkestone at meeting of National Council for Sea Angling, I took the opportunity of looking up the authorities at the B. S. A. S. rooms for the purpose of settling once and for all, if possible, the question of the correct definition of my 'megrim.' I am pleased to be able to support Mr. Patterson. The illustration in Dodd is an exact facsimile, including the two small oval fins depicted in the drawing of Mr. Nickels."

In the course of this discussion, a note from "G. C." was published respecting another "queer fish." He wrote :—

"I send you a rough sketch of a peculiar fish of the sole order, called here a 'witch.' It is taken occasionally in our trawls. The peculiarities are as follow: the under-side is distinctly 'coloured' to all appearance as if there were scales, although there are none apparent, the better description perhaps would be 'mottled'; a neutral tone about the colour or shade of a silver-tone photo. There is a bony ridge which runs from the apex of the gill and forms a nose; the eyes are set in bulbous cases so as to be used all ways; the mouth is small for the size of the fish, with very small tooth formation; there is a slight *coloration of carmine* on the left side of the snout; the tail is 'wispy,' but the fins, dorsal and ventral, both voluminous, and reach from the head to the commencement of the tail. The gills are close and in two curves; the colouring of the upper part is much that of the light-coloured sole, but there are distinct markings of a darker shade."

The looked-for discussion on this new topic proved abortive; in my own reply I simply stated that :—

"I have the 'witch' on my list, giving its legitimate name as pole or craigfluke (*Pleuronectes cynoglossus*), although the long, rough dab (*Hippoglossoides limandoides*) and the [locally] rarer sail fluke (*Rhombus megastoma*), all on my list of Norfolk fishes, are by the fisher folk all classed under the silly name of 'witches.'"

Here the "witches" remained until the above paragraph, dated December 29, 1906, appeared in the *Angler's News* To this paragraph I replied as follows :—

"SIRS,— . . . Now about these witches. 'Witch' is a trade name that covers a lot of, *perhaps*, indifferent-eating sea flatfishes, and is really a genteel name for 'offal'—in the flat department. Smacksmen and others call the sail fluke (*Arnoglossus megastoma*) a 'witch.' Naturalists term it as follow :—

Passer cornubiensis (Jago).
Rhombus cardina (Cuvier).
Pleuronectes megastoma (Donovan).
Pleuronectes pseudopalus (Pennant).
Pleuronectes Boscii (Risso).
Hippoglossus Boscii (Risso) (!).
Rhombus megastoma (Nilsson).
Zeugopterus velivolans (Richards).
Zeugopterus megastoma (Collett).
Arnoglossus Boscii (Günther).
Zeugopterus Gottsche (Winther).

"So you see what a lot of conjuring and mystification may be made with the shuffling of a few Latin names! The sail fluke and carter, of Couch, are one and the same fish. This species grows to nearly two feet in length. I met with some nearly that length a few months ago in a fish shop; these had come into Lowestoft harbour by a trawler, and been carted to Yarmouth. We depend on Lowestoft for nearly all our trawl fish! I secured one, and had it photographed, thinking it might come in useful some day. . . .

"To the sail fluke as a 'witch' may be added the pole, or long-flounder (*Pleuronectes cynoglossus*—Linnæus). This fish has a remarkably small head for its length, differing thus from the sail fluke, which has a whopper. The pole runs to fourteen and sixteen inches in length. One other 'witch' is the long, rough dab (*Hippoglossoides limandoides*—Bloch), which is more like the sail fluke in its proportions. This

does not run larger than fifteen inches in length—according to Day, who gives that as the length of the longest known British example. But in January, 1891, I obtained one sixteen inches long. All these fishes are on my East Norfolk list. . . ."

There is very little doubt that many unscrupulous fishmongers occasionally mix odd examples of "witches" with the true soles, for there is not much dissimilarity in *shape* to an inexperienced eye, although any one well acquainted with the *flavour* of the latter would quickly detect a difference.

A friend of mine, a local fish-merchant, when on a visit to London, saw a big spread of these coarser fish behind which the fishmonger had raised a huge ticket marked "WITCHES." On my friend laughingly remarking to the seller that he didn't know a "witch" when he saw one, the man promptly replied:—

"Oh, well, it don't much matter, for a fine name suited them as didn't know what they was!"

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THE MEGRIM

The first megrim (*Arnoglossus laterna*) I ever saw was given to me in 1903 by a fish-hawker; it had been taken, so far as I could ascertain, in a trawl net, and in all probability was captured many miles away from my particular domain. I was fortunate in having one brought me on April 30th, 1906, which had been taken in a shrimp net within hail of Yarmouth sands. In the same bottle of formalin, two Montagu's suckers (*Liparis montagui*) bore it company. The fish was exceedingly sole-like in appearance and proportions, but was of a light sandy hue above, a fact which did not escape my observant friend. It had the appearance of having been dipped into hot water, and the remarkably tender skin had been broken and abraded. It is so difficult to preserve it intact that it has gained the suggestive sobriquet of the "scald-fish." The length of this example was $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. A second specimen, slightly smaller, came to hand from the same source on July 30th, thus furnishing me with two examples, in one season, of a fish hitherto unrecorded for Norfolk.

ABNORMAL FISHES

From time to time curious and deformed fishes come to hand, and are always worthy of being recorded. The following examples have recently come under my notice:—

Stunted tubfish.—On May 23rd, 1905, my attention was called to a curiously stunted example of the tubfish or "latchett" (*Trigla hirundo*). Its extreme length was 11 in., of which the head measured $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. Viewed from above there was a distinct half-circular curve in the lateral portion of the fish, the tail assuming the normal position. The anterior half of the fish was abnormally thick.

Deformed haddock.—A haddock 13 in. in length had a most singularly curved hump on the back, below the first dorsal fin, immediately at the commencement of the second dorsal fin the back suddenly becoming depressed in a V-shaped manner, the third dorsal being situated on the top of the anterior portion, between the right part of the V depression and the caudal fin. The lateral line ran exactly on the curves followed by the backbone. On dissection I discovered two bony-like knobs formed by a coalescence of the vertebræ. In the following October I obtained a codling with an almost similar curved body, with the angles slightly less sharp.

Queer herring.—A full-grown herring was brought to me on November 28th, 1905, on the left side of which was a tumour the size of a two-shilling piece. The fish looked sickly and exhaled an unpleasant smell. I quickly made a rough sketch of it, and then cremated it.

Stunted codling.—On the same date I have a record of a 2 ft. codling, normal in shape save in the head, which was exceedingly foreshortened on the upper part, the lower jaw protruding some distance beyond the upper. When closed the fish had a singularly weever-like, sinister appearance.

Curious plaice.—A 12-in. plaice on a slab, among others, attracted my attention in December, 1905, by a strange deformity of the tail fin, which grew at nearly half a right angle to the fish. What was more curious was the fact of one side of this appendage being tubular, as if the edge of the tail had been turned over and grown to it. I ran a pencil quite easily up this hollow.

White "roker."—At the end of 1905 a friend reported to me having seen a perfectly white thornback ray (local "roker") on Lowestoft pier, his statement being corroborated by two or three other persons, who, like himself, had gone over to purchase fish for their Yarmouth customers.

Under-coloured plaice.—I saw a 2-lb. plaice on January 18th, 1906, with both sides dark, save at the under side of the head, and with red spots on each side. On March 1st I examined another specimen, the under side of which was of a curious bluish colour, but no suggestion of spots could be traced upon it.

White turbot.—A 3-lb. turbot was on sale in a local shop on June 19th, 1906. The upper side was wholly white, with the exception of a thin brown ring around each eye, and a faint splashing of brown on the edges of the surrounding fins. There were no tubercles or spiny processes on the upper surface, which are so characteristic of the normal fish. It was as smooth and glossy as a china dinner plate.

Strange salmon.—The queerest salmon I ever saw arrived in July, 1906, from Scotland, It was a 6-lb. fish with an extraordinary head. The upper part was as round, at the foreshortened end, as a cricket ball, the "nose" being turned under and flattened to the palate, the under jaw being of the normal shape, and standing out beyond the other considerably. The tongue, of the usual length, lay in the hollow of the lower jaw, but the distorted mouth shut to quite close and compactly.

Red codling.—On Christmas Eve, 1890, I saw lying on a fish stall a codling of a curiously red colour, which answered in general appearance to Couch's dorse (*Gadus callarias*, Linn.). On August 30th, 1906, I met with another of a rich yellow-red colour. It measured 20 in. It looked as if it had been carved out of rosewood.

White flounder.—A small flounder, white on both sides, was taken on Breydon, October 14th, 1906.

Short-lipped gurnard.—A very ugly red gurnard was preserved for me by a fish vendor on November 7th, 1906. The upper part of the head was normal in shape, but the lower lip was remarkably shortened, extending but a few lines in front of the eye, and when turned over there was a peculiarly shark-like appearance. I do not think that this deformity

was a freak, but am of opinion that the fish had at an early period of its life met with some accident.

Short-lipped cod.—During the same month a 3-lb. codling was caught off the jetty at Yarmouth with a precisely similar malformation, the end of the lower lip being but half the length of the upper one; in this case it was a genuine freak of nature. The specimen was preserved, in a jar containing spirits of wine, for my inspection.

Spotted brill.—A most beautiful brill, 11 in. in length, came into my hands early in February, 1907. The upper side was pure white with the exception of some four or five spots of the normal colour, each the size of a shilling, dotted along the bases of the dorsal and anal fins.

LARGE FLOUNDERS

My largest flounder record is of one taken in November, 1889, which weighed 3 lb. 5 oz.; it was 19½ in. long, 9½ in. wide, and 1½ in. through it in the thickest part. One accompanying it weighed 2 lb. 15 oz. If I remember rightly, both of these fishes were taken in a hoop-net near the fish-wharf, where, during the herring fishing, this species sometimes resorts in some numbers. The *Angler's News* of November 17th, 1906, cites two instances of large flounders being caught at Leigh and Brighton, weighing 3 lb. 1 oz. each. I thought mine a record fish, but yield the palm to Southwold, a small fishing town in Suffolk, from whence came the letter appended :—

"LARGE FLOUNDERS

"SIR,—I notice your records of several flounders of unusual weight being caught with rod and line, so should like to give my own experience of these fish. I always manage to get my share of them up to 2 lb. each, but one Wednesday afternoon four years ago I took two fish only in three hours. They were two flounders, weighing 3½ lb. and 2½ lb. These were caught with rod and line off the end of Southwold pier at low water.

"Yours truly, ROBT. J. CANOVA
"(Hon. Sec.).

"SOUTHWOLD SEA ANGLING SOCIETY."

THE FLYING-FISH

The following note was sent by me to the *Zoologist* (February, 1906) and may not be out of place here:—

"The records in the *Zoologist* of the occurrence of flying-fish on the Kentish coast are interesting, and recalled to me an account of one whose 'fin' was exhibited in the Fisheries Exhibition in London in 1883. I have hunted up the Catalogue of Exhibits made by the well-known Norwich naturalist, Mr. T. E. Gunn, and find the following:—

"'Case 50 FLYING FISH.—Fin of flying fish (*Exocœtus volitans*); specimen caught off Yarmouth, May 23rd, 1868. . . . Only known instance on this part of the eastern coast. I submitted it to the late Dr. J. E. Gray, of the British Museum, who identified the species for me.'

"For many years I have watched for an example to turn up, but as yet without success. I have not included this 'capture' in my *Nature in Eastern Norfolk*, for the simple reason that neither in the second edition of Lubbock's *Fauna of Norfolk*, nor in any of the *Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society*, is Mr. Gunn's specimen referred to. It would be well, however, for all East coast naturalists to be on the *qui vive*, and help to more firmly establish the claim of this fish to be on the Norfolk list."

I have been since assured by Mr. F. Leney that this flying-fish's "fin" is now in the Norwich Museum Collection.

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HOLIBUT-PLAICE

When passing through one of the back streets on August 17th, 1905, my attention was attracted by a very queerly coloured fish lying exposed on the slab of a small fish-shop. The fish was sixteen inches in length, and its shape at once struck me as exhibiting a blending of plaice and holibut. The colour of the upper side was bluish ash, the edges, nearing the fins, assuming a Naples yellow tint; the surrounding fins being the same colour as the back, and the tail somewhat darker, several orange-coloured spots, not nearly so pronounced as in an ordinary plaice, being sprinkled about on the upper side. The irides were straw-

yellow. The under side was milk-white, with the "splashiness" characterising the holibut, the fin rays looking as if they had been daubed with lime-white. I purchased the fish, which was, without the shadow of a doubt, a cross between the holibut and plaice, for a few pence. This fish, with several other interesting specimens, is in the Tolhouse Museum.

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AN OBSTINATE SKATE

A Breydoner named Thacker, when rowing up the Duffell's drain on Breydon, was struck by a curious flapping movement on a flat as he passed by. It suggested to him the struggles of a wounded bird making ineffectual efforts to fly. He accordingly pushed as close to the flat as possible, and at once saw that a large skate, left stranded by the ebb tide, was flapping its great finny disc in vain endeavour to reach water, or to realise its situation. Fastening his boat, he went on the flat with a bit of rope, which he hitched round the skate's tail, the fish remaining somewhat passive until he dragged it into the drain. The moment the monster —it was a good-sized fish—felt itself in its native element, it grounded, and resisted all Thacker's efforts to pull it into the boat; in fact, it very nearly dragged him in too. It was only by patiently waiting until he could take the fish off its guard that he got its "nose" uppermost, and so brought it into a position where he could belabour it until it was too feeble to resist being dragged into the punt.

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SHARK INCIDENT

When recently recalling our experiences of sharks, my shrimper factotum, Colby, informed me that, late in the 60's, when he was engaged in midsummer fishing for mackerel in the Wold, they got a large shark, "over 12 ft. long," in the nets, "makin' a nice old mess" of some fifteen of them (a "fleet" of mackerel nets then comprised eight-score sections, or nets). The shark (a "bottle-nosed 'un") was landed on the beach by one of the ferry-boats, and one or

two of the crew made more money, by an exhibition of it to visitors, than was good for them, for they went back drunk to the vessel.

On referring to Day (*British Fishes*, Vol. II, p. 299), under heading *Lamna cornubica* (Porbeagle), I find that a large shark is recorded by Mr. T. E. Gunn, for July 4th, 1867, and the length given as 11 ft. 5 in. Day remarks: "The fish must attain to 11 ft. or 12 ft. in length if Mr. Gunn's was this species; it has several times been captured up to 10 ft." I have records only up to 9 ft.

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SKATE LUXURIES

When I was a lad "dried skate" was a favourite luxury among the poorer classes in the town, more particularly loungers who spent their Sunday mornings in aimless loafings and gossips. Numbers made a pilgrimage to the inn of one "Dilly" Smith, who lived at the Suspension Bridge Tavern, immediately adjoining a bridge of that name. His fish-house gable (still standing) in the finer days, used to be festooned with hundreds of skate of various sizes and species, mostly "homers" (spotted rays) and blue skate. The latter was the favourite fish, being better flavoured and less spiny. "Roker" (thornback rays) were by no means in request, owing to their formidable skin-armour. After long drying by wind and sun, until the very blue-bottles had given them up as a hopeless nursery for their broods, the already "scored" fish were cut into strips and sold at a halfpenny, a penny, and twopence a strip, according to size and thickness. Queerer luxuries than these huge dishes of dried skate exposed for sale in the window could not be conceived, unless, perhaps, some wag of a shoemaker had replaced them by a display of worn-out boot-soles, which they somewhat resembled. It was odd, but we got used to the sight of seeing a score men at a time gnawing the highly-scented curiously-tasting morsels (I never could eat them myself), as they wandered to the quaysides, or leant over the bridge, enjoying their leisure and their occupation. You would sometimes see their lips bleeding after their tit-bits had been devoured. Crates of dried skates were sent from the neigh-

bourhood of Whitby—sometimes the fish were nearly three inches thick. Women used to meet the boats with big bundles of them slung across their backs.

Colby, my footless shrimper factotum, at one time sailed in the old *Kate* lugger with "Gabey" Thomas (afterwards a noted Breydoner). They used to catch a number of skate, which they gutted, tailed, and ribbed, afterwards towing them overboard for twenty-four hours, and then hanging them on the rigging to dry. Three weeks' or a month's hanging, according to the weather or the size of the skate, was necessary to make them sufficiently dry for sale. Those fish taken aboard already cured were often salted freely; a fact that rather pleased "Dilly" Smith, whose ale came in most welcome to assuage the great thirst provoked. There was a rather loose outlook kept by the police of those days on those who tippled on Sundays; and as the house had windows pretty well all round it, a policeman was visible a long way off, and possible eventualities were promptly provided against.

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DOG-FISH AS FOOD

Colby spoke very highly of "nurses" (larger spotted dog-fish) or "sweet Williams" as food, either boiled or fried. Aboard the boats they ate the fish only from "below the navel," i.e., the vent—"we chucked the other parts away." I believe this is the species known as "bull-huss" on the southern coasts, where it is in request for food.

* * * * * *

PLAGUE OF DOG-FISH

The summer and autumn of 1905 were remarkable for the numbers of voracious dog-fishes that infested the western and southern coasts. Grave complaints were made of their ravages, and their destructiveness to the nets of the fishermen. A London gentleman wrote to the *Angler's News* pointing out how their presence and numbers might be

turned to account by pursuing the dog-fish in turn, and utilising them for eating purposes. He wrote :—

"SIRS,—I have read with interest the complaints of Cornish and Devonshire fishermen about the voracious dog-fish. Many years ago Brighton fishermen made similar complaints, but they long ago learnt that the dog-fish is one of the most appetising and nourishing of all fishes, and they eat both 'pin-dog' [piked dog-fish] and 'huss' [larger spotted dog-fish] with the greatest gusto, instead of cursing them, cutting their heads off, and throwing them back into the ocean, as was their custom once. I am glad to see these fishes now *en evidence* on fish-stalls in London, because no fish is richer in nutritive properties ; the flesh is firm, sweet, and far superior to plaice or haddock, as your readers would realise if they got over the natural repugnance the ugliness of the fish excites, and tried them as food fried or stewed as eels.

"If they are so plentiful on the Cornish coasts, they should well repay catching and marketing ; and, indeed, I shall be much surprised if the Cornish fisherman has not already learned their good value, the more so as conger—a far inferior fish—is esteemed in a pie as a dainty of the highest excellence. There happens to be a saying that the devil himself never visits Cornwall for fear of being made into a pie, and if the good folk of Cornwall have not learnt the excellence and value of dog-fish for eating by this time, I advise them to at once put it to the test either as a pie, stewed, or fried. "M. H."

"G. C.," in an enthusiastic note on the subject, launched out into the natural history of the various species, and detailed the various uses he thought dog-fish might be turned to :—

". . . This should not prove anything but a profitable undertaking, as the flesh is eaten—it is used largely by purveyors of the fried article and, I understand, much appreciated ; the livers yield good oil ; the skins of both species of the spotted order are studded with tubercles of dentine capped with enamel, which make capital 'rub-skin' for polishing. . . . The eggs also may be prepared as a delicacy. So it appears to me that, through ignorance or the national trait of improvidence, we refuse to make use of these much-maligned species which have really been placed in our waters for our benefit. I trust my items are correct, as with Mr. Patterson about we laymen write in fear and trembling [*sic*], and that my small endeavours may lead to some active 'dog battues,' in which I trust that I may be invited to take part."

Naturally enough I joined in the debate, suggesting that there was little chance of killing the dog-fish off, notwithstanding absurd proposals to decimate their numbers by the use of dynamite, which might prove as disastrous to the attacking party as to the attacked. To my mind most of the species are far too much tainted by a flavour of ammonia to be really palatable, although I know full well many a one, beside other despised fishes, e.g. the wolf-fish and the sting ray, are "worked off" in the fish-shop frying-tanks, and doled out in slices to the hungry at supper-time, the devourers never suspecting but that they are provided with primer joints than these!

There are simple problems still needing solution. How is it that certain animals that prey on others themselves taste rank when eaten, and others do not? For instance, the whiting not only devours other fishes, but those of his own offspring, yet he is a delicate morsel; the sole devours mollusca, and is himself delicious; yet the scoter duck, which preys on the self-same 'shell-fish,' is by no means palatable by reason of its fishy flavour. Codfishes, besides knowing the gastronomic virtues of the Norwegian lobster and crabs, also devour herrings with almost proverbial greed. The dog-fish fattens on herrings, yet he is by no means so dainty eating as the codfish. In my letter I referred to some amusing incidents respecting queer dishes I have sampled, and treated the dog-fish subject in a rather cynical manner. Other letters followed, and, as is often the case, other subjects beside "dog-fish" came into the correspondence, which, however, while it lasted, was by no means uninteresting. My letter of December 17th wound up the discussion, and was as follows:—

"SIRS,—Whatever rascalities the dog-fishes may have been guilty of, they have not altogether lived a purposeless life. They have at least imparted an interesting flavour to your correspondence column, which has been enjoyed on both sides of the table—apparently. I take it that the subject has been fairly thrashed out, and should not have referred to it again, only I tumbled across a strange item in my friend E. K. Robinson's delightful little weekly, *The Country Side*, a few days ago. It appeared in all solemnity that surrounds truth, and reads as follows:—

"'*Effect of the war on sharks.*—A curious effect of the war

in the Far East is the migration of sharks to European waters. The submarine explosions are supposed to have frightened the creatures, which, coming via the Suez Canal, have made havoc among the fish of the Adriatic.'

"This has the smack of an Eastern fable about it. . . . I myself have dared to suggest . . . in the *Zoologist* that the incursion of so many steam luggers into the haunts of the herrings has driven away the larger sharks and various cetaceans from the locality. We have most certainly lived to see a great diminution of these once frequently taken sea-monsters. . . . What a pity our allies did not label a few of the emigrants! Why did not the Marine Biological Association think of this before the war began?

"I have not yet fallen in with a nice fresh 'huss,' or 'doggie,' and shall now postpone experiments until after the holidays. . . . Your 'doggie' enthusiasts must not altogether despair of me, but must exercise charity as well as patience. . . . I would have—

> "'All who know the dear, delusive art
> By which Culina mollifies the heart,
> In pity to relent the brow severe,
> And o'er a brother's weakness drop the tear.'

"I say, sirs, when you get diving in amongst the old classic gourmands, how does the spirit of envy creep in! and how you do come to fall into line with them until one can believe that—

> "'. . . If, as Epicurus sings,
> All our joy from eating springs;
> Him who most enjoyment follow,
> Who's widest mouth and longest swallow.'"

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INTRODUCING THE DOG-FISH

A rather amusing incident that attended the first really serious introduction of the dog-fish as an article of food, came under my notice late in January, 1907. I was passing the barrow of a local itinerant fish-seller, when I noticed four long fish-carcases, skinned and ready for cooking, looking temptingly fresh and "flaky."

"What have you got there?" I asked.

"Japanese flake," said the fish-hawker, with a wink; he is one of my "scouts" for things strange in the fish line. "They've got some Japanese name for it," he added.

"They *look* nice—like young congers," I remarked, "or gurnards pulled out; but why not *dogs?*"

"That wouldn't do!" he replied knowingly.

But he had the day previously, under pretence of introducing a new fish for the fish-merchants, sold several at twopence each (a penny a foot!) and left some on trial, to be paid for on the morrow. One or two did not want more; but some liked them so well that they paid up and asked for others.

One cunning old man of the sea—whose wife had experimented at noon-time, enjoyed her fish, and cooked one for his tea—refused to eat it; he knew it, and didn't want hydrophobia! And the woman herself appealed to me to say if she was like to suffer any ill-effects! But a neighbour's children overheard the suggestion of hydrophobia, and were frightened when it was explained to them by some one that it was "a thing that made them bark like a dog!" and the poor children had to be appeased with a dose of liquorice powder as an antidote before they could be persuaded to sleep that night.

I have every reason to believe that for some time past local purveyors of fried fish have sold dog-fishes on the quiet, as they did the wolf-fish (*Anarrhichas lupus*) long before they dared to acknowledge it. And the clamour "for more" attending the sale of the dogs above mentioned, which were piked dogs, the ugliest of all the species and of most evil repute, argues well for a more extensive use of it as food, as well as its admittedly more toothsome cousins, the "husses," or spotted dog-fishes. Those who have partaken of these dogs describe the flavour as resembling that of the "docks," the body-portion of various skates.

CHAPTER III

SOME MAMMALIAN NOTES

WATER-VOLE AND CRAYFISH

I HAVE before referred to the partiality exhibited by the water-vole[1] (*Microtus agrestis*) to fresh-water fishes, and also to the swan-mussel (*Anadonta*), and would not again revert to the subject did I think it would lead to the hurting of one solitary hair of the merry little fellow's back. I like his company too well, for of all my eventide visitors when sitting out the last hour of evening in the stern of the *Moorhen*, when moored in some solitary corner in Broadland, none has gratified me more by queer antics and innocent gambols. Wholly unaware of my presence, a pair of voles have come out on the bank to court and play, varying the fun of careless existence by daintily nibbling the coarse, luscious grasses at the waterside; now chasing each other, now coyly making love, now sitting up as if half suspicious of being overlooked by they know not what. Happy little creatures! However, they must eat! And I have become fully convinced that their diet is of an omnivorous kind. When dealing with this subject in June, 1897, I received the following letter:—

"AYLSHAM, *June 7th*, 1897.

"I take the liberty of asking your opinion on a matter of natural history. I wish to ascertain with certainty, as I know you are a careful observer on these points.

"One day, the week before last, whilst fishing in the Bure, between the junction of Scarrow Beck and Blickling Mill, I found about twenty large crayfish, or rather their remains, in little heaps by the edge of the river, the tail parts neatly nibbled in a groove along the middle of the back to enable the contents to be extracted. The big claws [were] eaten through about half-way for the same purpose.

[1] *Notes of an East Coast Naturalist*, pp. 267–70.

"They were placed near the 'work' of water-voles: I took one claw from a hole. Around each heap lay the dung of voles. I have always thought the vole herbivorous, but I am inclined to believe it occasionally varies its diet with animal food, like the squirrel.

"The only 'others' I can think of being the culprits are the common rat, the otter, and possibly the weasel.

"Mr. F. Norgate tells me he has frequently observed the remains of frogs in small heaps [I have toads chiefly], which he thinks the work of the water-vole. . . .

"R. J. W. P."

Without a shadow of a doubt these crayfish had been fished up by the vole and operated upon, as I have observed them bring to the surface the swan-mussel and devour it; and although I never yet actually detected the vole making free with toads, I have seen that unhappy reptile minus toes in a position that clearly indicated an unexpected escape from the omnivorous rodent.

I have been assured by an old eel-babber, a man whose word I have always been able to believe, that he had on several occasions seen water-voles run off with the skins and heads of red herrings thrown on to the bank after a meal in his houseboat; this was generally observed in very severe weather, "when the poor things were hard set for a bit of grub." He had a small "hand-gun" in his houseboat on one occasion. This he loaded one afternoon and fired at a vole, knocking it over with a herring's head still held between its teeth. He "skun" the animal and made a tobacco-pouch of the pelt, which he carried about with him for several years.

A friend of mine, a capable observer, informs me that he is quite familiar with instances in which the water-vole has devoured the common frog.

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MORE BLACK RAT NOTES

In the January *Zoologist* (1906) a friend of mine, who has keenly followed up the vagaries of *Mus rattus* and its allies in the neighbourhood, wrote to the effect that:—

"The two local races of the black rat (*Mus rattus rattus* and *M. r. alexandrinus*) appear to be increasing in numbers, several fresh haunts having been brought to my notice.

Some young specimens of *alexandrinus* have been through my hands, and all appear to have darker tails than the adults, apparently due to the black hairs being closer together. I have recently had a fine old male of the *M. r. rattus* variety brought to me which had some time previously lost its left hind foot. The tibia had been broken through at the middle, and the muscles had healed at the knee, leaving about a quarter of an inch of clean bone projecting. The end of the bone was worn and polished, and the animal bore a rather ridiculous resemblance to a man with a wooden leg. The rat was in good condition, weighing five ounces full. The following measurements of it were carefully taken in the flesh: Head and body, $6\frac{3}{4}$ in.; tail, 9 in.; ear, $\frac{17}{18}$ in.; vibrissæ, $2\frac{5}{8}$ in.; hind foot, $1\frac{7}{16}$ in. "P. E. RUMBELOW."

My "note" in the *Zoologist* of February was as follows:—

"Mr. Rumbelow is, I think, correct in stating *Mus rattus* and its compeer, *M. alexandrinus*, are on the increase hereabouts. I am constantly hearing of their appearance in fresh quarters, and of very little to their credit. Cats are very fond of hunting them, and eagerly eat them, leaving only the snout and teeth. The rats themselves are not averse to anything that promises the least nourishment, and are not above nibbling the toe of a sound sleeper. A house in which a babe was some time ago seriously mauled by black rats has since been shut up, for the smell of those poisoned, after the carpenters had been at work, has made the place as insanitary as it was before unsavoury. In warehouses, dates, eggs, jars of jam—anything, in fact—is fish in their net, Passing a sail-loft on January 25th, a sailmaker asked me if I could do with a couple of rats, 'one of 'em a *clinker!*' i.e. an extraordinary large one. I gladly accepted them. One was a jet-black male *Mus rattus*, the other a very large example of *Mus rattus alexandrinus*. As it differs slightly from one referred to by Mr. J. G. Millais as coming from Yarmouth (*Zool.*, 1905, p. 203), I have thought it worth recording. Measurements: Head and body, $8\frac{1}{4}$ in.; tail, 9 in.; weight, $7\frac{1}{4}$ oz. Body of a smoke-brown generally, with slightly darker hair on the back, and of a lighter hue below. Both fell victims to their love of Russian tallow, not a scrap of which that sailmaker dare leave about at night, except some placed in a trap for their especial benefit and his own. A very tarry smell emanated from the hides of both rats, due to their having made their beds of such tarry twine as they found lying about the loft.

"I went with this sailmaker into his oilroom, a place in

which large cans of various oils were stored, among them being two or three containing herring-oil, a product, curiously enough, boiled and extracted from the oily scum which floats to the surface of the enormous keelers or tubs in which the herrings are rinsed before 'riving' on the spits for smoking. Hundreds of thousands of herrings go through the tub before the filthy water, thick with scales and blood, is let off below. This oil is of a very greasy nature and takes a long time to refine itself clear; the cans in which it is stored for the sailmaker's use are very lightly bunged, to allow for the expansion and contraction caused by atmospheric changes.

"The sailmaker assured me that the black rats would mount these cans and push over the bungs placed askew in the neck, and when unable to reach the oil with a paw would *dip in their tails!* 'That's right,' said he.

"'Why don't they nibble your sails?'

"'Well,' he remarked, 'before we dress a wherry's sail we have to mix in a certain proportion of tar, and they draw a line at a tarry flavour!'"

ALBINO *Mus rattus*

On January 28th, 1907, one of my "specimen hunters," a merry little fish-hawker, brought to my house a queer-looking rat.

"My cat only caught it a hour ago!" said he, holding the rat in one hand and his cap in the other. "It's a reg'lar novelty, and she'd jist kilt two black 'uns afore she got that."

"So *you've* got rats!" I said.

"Bless you, yes, sir," he said, smiling; "we hev a nice old time with 'em."

The rat in question was just full grown and in excellent condition, for the cat had had her fill of the previous two, and needed very little persuasion to part with it. By lamplight the coat of the animal appeared to be bluish-white, suggesting to me the hue of an Arctic fox in summer jacket. The tail was of a creamy tint, and slightly shorter than that of a normal *Mus rattus;* the ears were greyish, and the head altogether of the true typical form. The eyes were gleaming red, with an opalescent tint, and almost as full and bright as in life. I forwarded the animal at once to Dr. S. H. Long, of Norwich, who exhibited it, still in the flesh, with several other varieties of *Mus rattus* and *Mus alexandrinus* which I

had sent him from time to time, at a meeting of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society on the 29th. This albino example, which I believe to be unique, measured as follows:— Head, $1\frac{3}{4}$ in.; head and body together, $6\frac{1}{2}$ in.; tail, $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.

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RAT AND OYSTER

Some years ago, in the palmy days of "smacking," a deep-sea fisherman brought ashore a "ped" (hamper) of coarse-shelled "smack" oysters.

These he good-naturedly gave to the landlord of the "Staff of Life" (since demolished), on the North Quay; and they were deposited in a back storeplace to be attended to on the morrow.

Early next morning a queer noise was heard in the store-room as of something being thrown and dragged about, and search was at once made. To his surprise the landlord discovered a large rat with an oyster firmly attached to the middle of its tail. It would seem that, attracted by the pleasing aroma of the shell-fish, this rat had come to examine them, and had evidently drawn his tail by accident between the shells of a gaping oyster, which, on being so oddly tickled, instantly closed. It goes without saying that no persuasion on the part of the rat would allow of the extraction of his caudal appendage, nor of access, unaccompanied, to his hole; also that the owner of the oysters speedily settled matters with the objectionable admirer of his toothsome molluscs.

BREYDON RATS

My boat-shed on the edge of Breydon is never free from a pair of rats, which bring up their families in the midst of surroundings so damp that one wonders they ever rear any at all. It is seldom that more than one pair frequent my location, probably because they resent intrusion, but I have noticed invariably that when I have taken it into my head to trap them, they are at once succeeded by another couple. They never do me harm by nibbling or destroying anything, but are annoying by their persistency in bringing shore-

crabs into the place—having ferreted them out from under stones and refuse, when the tide has fallen—and by devouring them, leaving little piles of broken shells to mark the spot where they have their suppers. I have had occasionally to shovel out the debris. Now and again they bring in fish-offal and other queer viands, never troubling to cast away the remnants, which produce at times, especially after a higher tide than usual, a strange and powerful odour.

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CURIOUS CATS' FEET

For some years past I have known of certain domestic cats in Yarmouth remarkable for the unusual number of toes upon the fore-feet. From observations I have made, and the particular neighbourhood in which these felines live, I am strongly inclined to believe that they are all more or less related. To some one's great regret, no doubt, a friend of mine secured one of these animals (its colour shall be nameless), which he informed me *died rather suddenly* soon after ; and there was a black specimen, he believed unrelated, which he intended to capture at the same time ; but it gave him the slip, and has never been heard of since. He cut off the fore-feet of the cat that "died," and kindly furnished me with an exceedingly good photograph[1] of them. The left foot had seven digits, the right one six—thirteen in all, a rather "unlucky number" for Tabby. In every other instance, as well as in the present one, the cat's hind-feet contained the normal number of toes.

* * * * * *

THE PIGMY SHREW

The pigmy shrew (*Sorex minutus*) appears to be common in the neighbourhood of St. Olaves, a few miles from Yarmouth, and is found in the marshy districts nearer home. The first example that came to my notice was a rather badly-mauled little chap in a bottle of spirits, which my friend Mr. P. E. Rumbelow had taken from a cat, not the

[1] This photograph was reproduced in the *Zoologist*, 1905, p. 462.

only one this particular animal secured for us for examination; cats are, it seems, eager to pursue and kill the shrew, but, probably on account of its queer odour, refuse to eat it. It is known to the young people in that neighbourhood as the "ranny," a common name given to *S. vulgaris* in country districts north of Yarmouth, where the animal is not uncommon, although I believe unknown around St. Olaves. The pigmy shrew is not entirely nocturnal, but hunts around for its prey in broad daylight.

* * * * * *

SOME SEAL NOTES

The common seal (*Phoca vitulina*) occasionally frequents the sand-banks on the Wash in some numbers, until lately I believe, without the local fishermen taking much objection to their presence. Complaints, however, would seem to have been made quite recently, it being suggested that "they frighten away the fish." This may lead up to some persecution, and so good a target may tempt those whose business or pleasure it is to carry rifles to try to reduce the numbers.

The Lynn fishermen at one time used to net or entrap individuals, selling them alive to showmen for exhibition purposes. I myself, in my scheming days, had examples on show, my showman-in-ordinary putting them through their paces. Their barking suggested "yes" or "no" on command, and a tambourine was rattled in a lively fashion by a flipper when an animal was ordered to do so. Some seals, especially when captured young, become very docile and tame, whereas those taken when old are never tractable. When keeper at P—— Gardens, in 1884, I had a seal rockery and pond, wherein several were incarcerated. One large seal was so vicious that he would rush at me like a mastiff, and could only be kept at bay by my facing him with a stiff bristly broom.

On one occasion when letting in water from the lake above, a huge eel came through the large connecting pipe, and began to dash about on the scarcely water-covered floor. Before I could get in to secure it, the large seal had floundered out and seized it. The animal very speedily

snapped the eel's vertebra in a number of places and swallowed it whole!

On rare occasions a seal swims and drifts into this neighbourhood, and has a very restless time of it, being shot at by gunners, startled off the beach by pedestrians when bunched up on the sands for a nap, and anathematised by sea-anglers. One day in November, 1891, a seal made its appearance in the vicinity of the jetty. An angler had just hooked a codling, when something that a young urchin likened unto a "corpse" seized the fish and swam boldly away with it. To the fisherman's surprise he immediately hooked the seal when endeavouring to pull the fish away from it, and at once essayed to land it. To this end he played the animal and gradually drew it near the shore, whilst eager spectators, lining the beach below, waited to give it a warm reception. But the seal took fright as it came into the breakers, and making a sudden dash, broke the line, taking a hook with it. It was subsequently seen in the neighbourhood of Scroby sands, and probably got safely away, a sadder and a wiser animal.

I well remember a grey seal being shot with a punt-gun on Breydon in November, 1882. More than one old Breydoner, who witnessed the massacre of the poor brute as it struggled to escape over the flats, have graphically pictured to me the "rumpus" and the "outpour of blood that reddened the drain." Poor beast! A pound of shot sent into its head at close quarters *would* make a ghastly gaping wound. I am glad I was absent at the time.

* * * * * *

A RABBIT YARN

Some twenty or thirty years ago a certain lighthouse keeper, recently come to W—— lighthouse a few miles north of Yarmouth, on getting settled, thought it would be advantageous to him to turn a bit of the sandy warren attached to the premises into a vegetable garden. Accordingly he set to work, and having delved it into the semblance of a garden patch, proceeded to plant it. For the first few days the young vegetables promised to flourish in their new quarters, and the "bunnies" on the adjacent warren had not yet got

over their surprise and the fear of committing trespass. But one morning the lighthouse keeper came to his garden to find that something in the nature of a blight had visited one corner during the night. Somewhat puzzled he replanted the ground, but next night more of his tender vegetables vanished; and he was still further puzzled. He dug, manured, and planted again, but with like result. He asked the village folk, who smiled, and naturally suggested "rabbits"! The keeper watched, and found it was so. He complained to H——, the lord of the manor, and asked him to keep off his rabbits.

"If you wish to grow greenstuffs," said the lord of the manor, "fence your garden in yourself!"

This the keeper did not see his way to do, but set to work on a much harder if less expensive plan. He dug a trench two feet wide and three feet in depth all round the garden, hoping that it would be a sufficient barrier against the marauding rodents.

One morning after he had completed his trench he visited it, and to his great surprise found a large number of rabbits prisoners therein. They had got in but could not get out. I am informed there were over one hundred animals entrapped. These he managed to kill and find a market for.

"All right!" said the lighthouse keeper, "this'll do! it's better than a fence."

And he managed to dispose of nearly seven hundred rabbits before the lord of the manor discovered his loss, and the cause of the cessation of complaints.

H—— was one day surveying his warren when he espied the keeper acting in a strange and excited manner, and came up to the edge of the trench.

"Why, man! what's this?" he gasped; "*you're clearing my warren!*"

"I'm content," replied the keeper, still knocking rabbits on the head, as he pushed a big box in front of him, stowing the rabbits up as he went. "If you want to keep your rabbits, you'd better fence them in!"

And so H—— did, for he immediately ordered some rolls of wire-netting, burying three feet of it below the surface, and raising it several feet above, all round the garden!

* * * * * *

RODENTS' TEETH MISHAPS

Instances, though rare, of wild rabbits have been met with in which the fore-teeth had grown to an unusual length, to the great discomfort of their unfortunate possessors. As is well known, the incisor teeth of rodents are continually growing, to supply the loss incidental to their gnawing habits. Thus it happens that if one or both incisors become broken, the osseous matter at the root of the tooth opposite still keeps pushing that tooth forward, and a preternatural elongation ensues. How such an unfortunate rabbit manages to feed is not easily explained, and trouble must eventually follow.

In February, 1895, I obtained a rabbit with both of the top incisors missing, the lower ones being abnormally developed, standing out very much after the fashion of an aged boar's or a babiroussa's tusks, the points very nearly reaching to either eye. It was trapped in the neighbourhood, and notwithstanding its infirmities was in fine condition, furnishing me with an excellent Sunday dinner.

A rabbit was observed at Norwich at about the same time with one incisor tooth grown and curved to a half-circle.

A friend of mine has a common brown rat preserved which had grown an under incisor to such an abnormal length that it formed a complete circle, the size of a wedding ring, the tip end coming to within an infinitesimal distance of the part of the tooth protruding above the animal's lip.

In 1884, when feeding some pheasants in an aviary, I saw the tail of a very large rat protruding from one of the corn hoppers, and immediately understood that an uninvited guest was dining therein. I seized a stick and stealthily crept behind it, whereon the animal, without the slightest show of haste, came out. I immediately knocked it down; and on picking it up saw that it was an aged individual, thin and emaciated, with the two upper incisors grown over and completely under its chin, preventing the poor beast from properly masticating its food, for each time it moved its jaws the points of the teeth chafed the skin, which showed signs of contact clearly enough.

* * * * * *

A CETACEAN MIGRATION

A somewhat remarkable movement of cetaceans, presumably porpoises, took place in March, 1906, a big procession of them being observed swimming through the roadstead. Various reports reached me respecting them, some persons insisting that they were "scoulters" (white-beaked dolphins) and that they were at least twenty feet in length. Allowance must be made for the difficulty of judging the length of moving objects in the sea. I made inquiries with a view of ascertaining whether others had observed them further north of the county, but met with no response. Mr. Lowne, a local naturalist, assured me that he saw this shoal on the afternoon of Sunday the 19th; he believed them to be porpoises; they appeared to be about six feet in length, and their ranks extended almost from the Wellington Pier to the *St. Nicholas* lightship—a distance of considerably over a mile. They sprang out of the water three or four at a time. The water was perfectly calm, and any shoals of "spring" herrings in their line of march must have fared very badly.

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